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**MEN'S TALK ABOUT FOOD: A DISCOURSE ANALYSIS**

**EWAN JAMES GILLON B.A. M.Sc**

**A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the  
requirements of the Open University for the  
degree of Doctor of Philosophy in the discipline  
of Psychology.**

**QUEEN MARGARET COLLEGE  
JUNE 1997**

Author no. P 9275089  
Date of award: 8<sup>th</sup> August 1998

**This thesis is dedicated to the memory of John Turner**

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## Abstract

In this thesis I examine men's talk about food. I argue that many academic knowledges of food have adopted a realist epistemological stance that is problematic with regards to the functional and constructive nature of language. Consequently, I propose a focus upon how language is used to construct food in talk. I also argue that gender has been highlighted by much research as of significance in relation to food, but that men have been subject to very little in-depth study. I therefore propose a need to examine men's accounts of food. Employing a discursive action approach, I examine accounts produced by eight men. In talk about meat, I argue speakers reject the proposition that meat is essential, but also acknowledge its significance for health. I propose they downplay salad as a central feature of diet yet deny that it is objected to. I also suggest that respondents seem sensitive to a number of negative inferences relating to the consumption of sweets and biscuits. Additionally, speakers downplay the likelihood of buying slimming foods and characterise weight as un-problematic. However, they also stress that their weight is monitored. Similarly, respondents reject feeling guilty about food but demonstrate that their food consumption is not unregulated. In relation to cooking and shopping, I propose speakers deny that they are responsible for these tasks within the household. However, I also suggest that they display a sensitivity to potentially negative inferences, such as inequity, that may arise in connection with this state of affairs. Finally, I assert that participants deny eating at fast food restaurants and stress their variable explanations they produce. To conclude I highlight the complexity of food as a topic of study and consider the utility of a discourse analytic approach to men's accounts in this area.

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## **CHAPTER ONE**

## 1.0 Eating or talking : a question of epistemology

In this research I examine men's talk about food from a discourse analytic perspective. The study consists of four analytic chapters - each of which focuses upon a specific aspect of food that has been subject to a considerable amount of attention from academic researchers. However, it is my contention that little interest has been shown in the ways in which people themselves *construct* accounts of food. Analysis has tended to focus instead upon the actual nature of food practices or the meanings that relate to them. Accounts that are produced within empirical research studies are generally viewed as a neutral medium through which such actualities can be revealed. This epistemological position is problematic for reasons I will explicate as my argument develops.

A second proposition underpinning my research is that a focus upon men's accounts is important. Existing research has stressed the significance of gender in relation to food. Yet little in-depth research has been undertaken with men. Consequently, men's relationship to food has been constructed largely upon the basis of intuition and the common-sense understandings of researchers - a state of affairs I contend is not acceptable bearing in mind the centrality of food in lives of both men and women.

I have organised this thesis in a manner designed to enable my argument for examining the accounts of men to proceed in a coherent manner. Consequently, in this first chapter I initially develop the contention that a focus upon the construction of accounts is important before moving on to briefly explicate some of the reasons as to a focus upon men's talk is of particular value. This latter proposition is substantiated throughout the analytic chapters in relation to the aspects of food I consider.

The first step in this thesis is, however, backward. In order to develop my argument regarding the importance of examining of accounts from discourse analytic perspective, I wish to briefly return to my original starting point for this research - an examination of men's dietary beliefs and practices.

### 1.1 In the beginning

When I began this research I was interested in looking at questions relating to men's dietary beliefs and practices. While a considerable amount of analytic work had been undertaken on women's experiences of, and relationships to, food (e.g. Charles and Kerr, 1988: Price and Sephton, 1991), men had been the topic of little academic interest. There are certainly very good reasons as to why, up until then, women had been the primary focus for analysis. Feminist researchers had highlighted the problems faced by many women in relation to food that, they argued, stemmed directly from women's structural position within Western culture. A key point in relation to the household, for example, was that women reported that they cooked foods in accordance with the preferences of men (Murcott, 1982). Women's own preferences were thus subordinate to their male partners.

While observations such as this were employed to highlight male power within various domains related to food, what research hadn't offered up until that point was an understanding of the kinds of beliefs held, and practices undertaken, by men *from the perspective of men*. This seemed a significant omission for a number of reasons<sup>1</sup>. If women cook in accordance with male preferences, it could be argued that an examination of the nature of such preferences and the male beliefs that underpin these is essential in order to develop strategies for change (Thorogood and Coulter, 1992). Moreover, Scotland has one of the highest adult mortality rates

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<sup>1</sup> see appendix I for fuller discussion of these issues.

in Western Europe and the links to diet are quite clear (Anderson and Hunt, 1992). As research suggested that male food preferences are less healthy than those of women (Pill and Parry, 1989), it seemed important to explore the beliefs that underpinned these, and the practices that led men to consume a less healthy diet than women (Scottish Office, 1993). The changing culture of food (Beardsworth and Keil, 1992a) was another factor to consider. Many traditional assumptions concerning male involvement in tasks such as shopping and cooking had to be reassessed bearing in mind the shift toward supermarket buying, and the increasing availability of convenience foods (e.g. Henson, 1992).

#### 1.1.1 The pilot study

To examine issues such as this from the perspective of men I devised a study examining men's dietary beliefs and practices in both household and workplace contexts. In order to perform an in-depth examination of men's experiences, the research was ethnographic in nature. To generate themes and test methods I undertook a pilot study<sup>2</sup> for which I recruited ten men of various ages and occupational status, five from each of two different workplaces. I undertook observation in each workplace for the period of a week, and each respondent took part in a focus group, completed a food diary for three days, and was interviewed in-depth regarding their food habits and beliefs. The intention of this research was to develop a deep, ethnographic understanding of these men's relationship to food.

To analyse the pilot data I attempted to identify recurrent issues and meanings relevant to the participants in accordance with ethnographic practice (e.g. Agar, 1986). However, in undertaking the analysis I encountered a number of problems. Contradictions emerged between what was being said and what I observed was being done. Data from observation did not bear

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<sup>2</sup> see appendix II for a detailed description of the pilot study



out claims made in interviews by certain men. One respondent, for example, claimed to buy food “very rarely” (CE4, p.09)<sup>3</sup> at a particular location for reasons of cost. However, he was frequently observed buying food from that catering facility. Similarly, another participant (BS2, p.14) stated that he didn’t buy food from fish and chip shops at the end of his shift, but was observed doing so on one occasion.

I also encountered contradictions in the focus group and interview data itself. I noticed that responses to questions were occasionally contradictory or inconsistent. In analysing the content of interview data, a number of contradictory or competing accounts emerged in relation to specific issues. In one interview, for example, a respondent offered the following two assessments of his experience of hunger. Firstly, in relation to a question on boredom at work, he said “sometimes I like to keep myself on that hungry edge” (BS3 p.1). Later in the *same* interview, he stated that he “cannae stand feeling hungry” (BS3 p.22).

The difficulty arising from these two kinds of contradiction related to the analysis of the data. A number of questions emerged as to what was the true version of the respondents’ relationship to food: their dietary beliefs and practices. While much of the data seemed coherent, there were a considerable number of inconsistencies and irregularities. One way of resolving these would have been to have probed respondents further on issues that appear contradictory (Hammersley and Atkinson, 1995). However, this was very difficult from a practical point of view and would no doubt have resulted in defensiveness from the participants, as well as additional demands upon their time. It may also have thrown up additional contradictions which in turn would require to be resolved.

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<sup>3</sup> this bracketed information refers to the respondent interview and the page number upon which this quote resides

My problem here was the tension between a desire to examine the meanings and practices relevant particularly to my respondents, but the requirement to make analytic decisions as to which responses were accurate, and which were, for example, ironic. The involvement of the researcher in manufacturing an ethnographic account has been considered in depth by a number of theorists (e.g. Atkinson, 1990). Indeed, Clifford (1986) has gone so far as to argue that an ethnography can only ever produce a 'partial truth'. However, upon examining other studies grappling with similar problems, it became clear that my difficulties stemmed from the view of language I had adopted. By treating men's descriptions in focus groups, interviews and the food diary as a reflection of their underlying beliefs and practices, I was ignoring the functional and constructive nature of language. In other words, I was not accounting for the way in which language is used interactionally to perform specific actions and construct particular versions of the world (Garfinkel, 1967). To revise my view of language in accordance with this understanding, I had to reject my prior attempt to examine *real* underlying beliefs and practices and instead view what people say as an interactionally orientated construction. Consequently I took the step of re-focusing my research upon how men construct their relationship to food in talk. In the next section I will explicate the basis of this decision in greater detail.

## 1.2 The language of food

The starting point for this research on men's accounts of food is the proposition that what we understand as real is constituted through and within language (Burman and Parker, 1993). What is meant by this is that language is the medium through which the social world, our experiences of it and relation to it are constructed. Rather than seeing language as referential - as a mirror reflecting the true nature of a particular event or experience by way of accounts and descriptions<sup>4</sup> - language is seen as constructing phenomena by describing them in particular

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<sup>4</sup> a metaphor provided by Potter, 1995

ways. This constructive role has a number of implications for research into food. Perhaps most fundamentally, what we eat becomes interesting not in terms of the actual nature of the substances we consume, but instead how they are described and accounted for.

There is no doubt that human beings have a variety of nutritional requirements that are imperative to life. These needs have been categorised into nutrients such as carbohydrates, fats, proteins, minerals and vitamins, water and non ingestible materials such as dietary fibre. A food substance, for human beings, can thus be defined as (Ministry for Agriculture, Food and Fisheries, 1985, p.1):

Any solid or liquid which when swallowed can supply.....material from which the body can produce movement, heat or other forms of energy...material for growth, repair and reproduction...substances necessary to regulate the production or the process of growth and repair.

There are many different substances that, according to this definition, may be considered as foods. To consume 150 ants per day, for example, would provide any human being with an average of 60 grams of protein, 142 milligrams of copper, 220 milligrams of phosphorous in addition to calcium, iron and a number of vitamins (Hetzel *et al.*, 1978). Yet, ants are not eaten within the United Kingdom. As ants are such a good source of nutrition, a very legitimate question may be why this is so? Certainly there has been much work attempting to answer questions such as this by examining why particular substances become 'foods' within certain cultures (e.g. Mennel, 1985). However, such an approach takes as its starting point the observation that ants are not generally eaten. This starting point is problematic, as it presumes that practices (i.e. ant consumption) are knowable and examinable.

The proposition that there is an examinable reality pertaining to food consumption is certainly adopted by many researchers in the area of food who employ a number of different methodologies, both qualitative and quantitative, to establish 'facts' about eating practices (e.g. Gregory *et al.*, 1990) or, indeed, the cognitive processes underpinning food behaviours (e.g. Connor, 1994). However, in recent years, many theorists (e.g. Parker, 1990) have highlighted the constructed nature of all understandings of the world. They have argued that different knowledges are produced on the basis of specific ontological and epistemological assumptions which are themselves socially and politically defined (Foucault, 1972). Consequently, the possibility of establishing essential truths about human practices (or indeed cognitive processes) is contested. All facts about the world, it is argued, are socially constructed and thus interpretative (Edwards and Potter, 1992).

Research on food that claims to reflect real practices or cognitions must thus be viewed as a social construction produced on the basis of specific ontologies and epistemologies. As all knowledge is produced in this way, and is therefore a construction, there is no possibility of producing a singular, factual representation of eating beliefs or practices. Every form of knowledge is a representation and any argument to the contrary encounters what Edwards *et al.* (1995) describe as the realist's dilemma. As they state (*op.cit.*, p.27):

All...demonstrations and descriptions of brute reality are inevitably semiotically mediated and communicated. The very act of producing a non-represented, unconstructed external world is inevitably representational, threatening, as soon as it is produced, to turn around upon and counter the very position it is meant to demonstrate.

In other words, by arguing in language a particular object or practice is *real*, this object or practice is paradoxically *constructed* as such. An additional problem relates to the primary vehicle generally employed by social scientists to explore the social arena: i.e. reports. These



take two forms. The first is descriptions, written or oral, of particular states of affairs. Descriptions are generally associated with qualitative research and often regarded as a means of gaining an in-depth insight into practices and beliefs of respondents. The second kind of report are responses made on questionnaires or scaling devices. These reports are treated quantitatively (as, occasionally, are descriptions which are coded in terms of recurrent themes) and regarded as a measure of underlying beliefs or actual behaviours. In both instances, reports are generally considered as an important means of examining reality. As Burningham (1995, p.105-6) suggests:

Traditional sociological methods, ranging from in-depth unstructured interviews with informants, through to postal surveys...share..the assumption that the answers people provide - whether in the form of a tick on a survey questionnaire or as part of a long and detailed interview - can be used to formulate conclusions about their attitudes or perspectives...the language produced by respondents is regarded as an indicator of something else, whether that is what they think, what they do, did, or are likely to do in the future.

The use of reports as representations of reality in this way fails to account for the interactional nature of language. Descriptions are linguistic representations that perform a functional and constructive role. Responses to survey questions and scales are similarly interactional and produced in response to a linguistically manufactured scenario. In both instances, the representations made are regarded as a passive and neutral reflections of actual practices or underlying cognitions (e.g. beliefs). This is a view I do not accept as it misrepresents the nature of language.

Language is a social practice (Garfinkel, 1967) that performs interactional functions. It is a means of accomplishing social actions such as requesting, denying, blaming and accusing. These actions are not always performed explicitly through direct articulations, but are often implicit

and discernible only in relation to the context within which a particular utterance is produced (Potter and Wetherell, 1987). For example, the statement 'I enjoyed that pasta' is an articulation of the pleasure derived from a particular food. However, in a specific interactional context it may also function as a subtle request for second helpings.

To view language as functional in this way undermines its ability to represent the actuality of a state of affairs (e.g. eating practices). In any interactional context, what is said (or represented on a questionnaire response) is a situated and occasioned construction designed to perform a specific contextually relevant action (Wooffitt, 1992). The representations produced are not necessarily reflections of an underlying reality (such as practices or cognitions) which makes treating them as such problematic. Moreover, if language is designed to perform interactional functions, talk specifically will vary considerably from context to context (as different interactional concerns arise). Any account produced by an individual will differ in accordance with its function (Sacks, 1982). Contradiction and variability are thus an inevitable part of representations: a point that makes eliciting a singular and coherent underlying *reality* from them a problematic undertaking.

In using language, any object or state of affairs may be described or represented in an infinite number of ways (Schegloff, 1972). Any description that is produced works to *construct* that state of affairs in a particular manner. For example, describing a particular eating experience as a 'banquet' is a very different construction of a meal than the phrase 'light lunch', although both may refer to the same collection of foodstuffs. Producing a linguistic representation is an act of construction involving the selection of culturally available terms, categories and descriptions for functional purposes. It is thus *through* language that particular objects or events are constructed. Moreover, it is to be expected that such constructions will vary as different interactional concerns arise.

According to Potter and Wetherell (1987) the variation in accounts that arises as an inevitable consequence of the constructive and functional role of language has been generally dealt with by social science in one of three ways. The first of these resolves variation by *restricting* the nature of the responses produced. The most common methods for doing so are questionnaire methods (i.e. tick boxes) and scaling devices. As I have argued previously, reports of this nature are often treated as reflections of underlying realities. However these reports are produced in contexts designed to contain the nature of the response produced. They are also situated and occasioned phenomena designed to perform specific social actions. Consequently, restricting the nature of reports produced does not resolve problems arising from the functional and constructive nature of language, but suppresses them.

The two other strategies that are generally employed by social scientists to manage variability focus upon descriptions. The first of these is *gross categorisation*. This approach involves coding responses in relation to broad categories to test hypotheses. Such an approach treats utterances or claims as discrete entities that may be categorised and thus removes them from their sequential and discursive context. As the function of a particular statement is inextricably linked to the trajectory of the discourse within which it is embedded, the action being performed by that statement is obscured (Antaki, 1994). Consequently, this strategy represses the functional dimension of language, and thus the variable actions performed. Additionally, the use of broad categories is also likely to gloss over many subtle differences and variations in the constructions produced.

The second strategy for suppressing variation within descriptions is defined by Potter and Wetherell (1987) as *selective reading*. This strategy is often employed within qualitative research studies where the aim is to examine in-depth the issues and meanings relevant to

participants through their descriptions. Due to their adopting a referential view of language, researchers may gloss over variability by identifying themes that appear significant in the descriptions, but actually reflect their own pre-conceived ideas about the topic in question. They may thus read the data *selectively*. Alternatively, they may reify certain descriptions and treat others as ironic (e.g. deliberately deceptive). Again this form of selection enables any variations that emerge to be dealt with and a coherent and singular account produced.

The three strategies I have considered all work to suppress the variability that may emerge in reports as a consequence of the functional nature of language. Moreover, they all empower the researcher to impose their own specific assumptions upon the data. To restrict participant responses in the form of a questionnaire requires the researcher to manufacture a linguistic context (i.e. specific questions) that will inevitably resonate with their own common-sense understandings. Similarly, both categorisation and selective reading require the analyst to make decisions as to what constructions to take from the data as relevant and real, and which to gloss over and ironise. Again, it is likely that the researcher's common-sensical understandings may determine the nature of the reading that is produced. By suppressing variability in these ways, it is thus the researcher's understanding that may determine the nature of the 'reality' produced. To fully recognise the participant's orientation, Potter and Wetherell suggest (1987, p.43):

What is required is an analysis of discourse which focuses upon variability and the construction of accounts.

From this proposed discourse analytic perspective, it is accounts and explanations that become the topic of analysis in themselves. By focusing upon how these are constructed, the analyst is able to examine the kinds of interactional functions being performed by the *participants*. This allows the variable and constructive use of language to become a central concern. Moreover, no



claims are made as to the *real* nature of the objects or activities described, as it is recognised that there is no way of telling which descriptions represent reality and which not (Potter, 1996).

It is important to recognise however, that accounts are not produced within a vacuum. Providing a description is a social activity which draws upon culturally available linguistic resources (Billig, 1987). As language is a shared system of meaning (Antaki, 1994), accounts resonate particular cultural themes or notions. Moreover, it is often through tacit reference to such themes that particular actions are performed. For example, an explanation as to why fried food is not eaten may refer to cultural resources regarding food such as dislike or lack of availability. These resources may be selected consciously or unconsciously by a speaker and referred to within an account to perform a specific action. Consequently, while language is used interactionally to perform actions and construct objects, there are cultural resources that provide the building blocks for discursive practices (Potter, 1996).

If language is considered as a social practice which acts to construct particular versions or objects, it is also essential that its links to power are recognised. Specific constructions may become so powerful that they become 'common-sense'. Their constructive nature may thus be obscured (Marshall and Wetherell, 1989). Moreover, it has been claimed that such constructions often have ideological effects and become enmeshed with social practices as they reflect and legitimate social inequalities and existing power relations (Parker, 1992)

There are various orientations toward the analysis of cultural resources within accounts (Antaki 1994). Some focus entirely upon the issue of power and regard language as organised into specific *discourses* through which objects are constituted (e.g. Parker, 1990). Others highlight the power effects of language but additionally emphasise its interactional flexibility via the notion of 'interpretative repertoires' (e.g. Potter *et al.*, 1990). Some take a more fine grained

approach to the analysis of discourse by examining how talk is organised using culturally available resources to perform particular constructive and interactional functions (e.g. Widdicombe, 1993). Finally, there are those analysts who focus entirely upon the shared interactional competencies through which order is maintained in talk (e.g. Heritage and Atkinson, 1984).

I will consider these different approaches to the issue of cultural knowledge and the analysis of discourse in more depth in chapter two. However, to maintain the clarity of my argument, it may be helpful to briefly explicate the broad parameters of my approach to men's talk about food. My argument so far has concerned the functional and constructive nature of language. As I stated earlier, revising my view of language to this from a 'realist' position has meant abandoning my original desire to examine the reality of men's dietary beliefs and practices. Instead, my focus has become how these are constructed in talk. In adopting such a focus, my concern is thus very much to do with the action orientation of language, in line with analysts such as Edwards and Potter (1992). In examining men's accounts of food, I am interested in considering the nature of the social actions *they* perform and the constructive, descriptive and organisational means by which these are carried out. I view such means as culturally available resources and competencies that are available to respondents by virtue of their membership of a natural language community (Widdicombe, 1993). Such resources may include common-sense constructions (i.e. constructions that have become so familiar and practised over time that they appear as natural) of social life and the role of food within it that are resonated within, and produced by, existing social scientific knowledges of food.

### 1.3 Items on the menu: knowledges of food

To undertake any analysis of talk about food, it seems appropriate as a starting point to examine the kinds of academic knowledges that have been produced about this topic. I am using the term knowledges here to refer to the arguments of a number of different theoretical positions or substantive foci, each of which has developed in relation to a very specific set of questions or concerns about human eating. I also employ this term to signify that I take no stance as to the validity of any of these positions (as perhaps may be suggested by a singular 'knowledge').

Such knowledges are generally represented as a means of describing or explaining various aspects of human food behaviour. However as social representations, they don't represent reality but construct it (Potter, 1996). In examining the knowledges of food that have been produced, a number of critical points can be made with regards to the epistemological orientations adopted. For example, in the vast majority of instances, by employing one or more of the three strategies identified by Potter and Wetherell (1987) social scientific knowledges of food may have produced understandings that may re-produce the common-sense constructions relevant to researchers, rather than the variable cultural resources that may be available to persons when assembling and negotiating the "meaning and significance of their social actions in and through talk" (Widdicombe and Wooffitt, 1995, p.65).

While academic knowledges may resonate existing common-sense resources in their theoretical propositions and epistemological bases, they also produce understandings that, themselves, may become culturally available resources. Academic theories, for example, may become assimilated into common sense usage through simplified media discussion over time (Widdicombe and Wooffitt, 1995). Moreover, understandings that have been produced by such theories may also become enmeshed with social practices. For example, understandings of the links between health and diet have provided the basis for health promotion activities and practices, in addition to dietary changes implemented by members of the population.

In relation to food, a number of knowledges have been produced. One reason for this is the centrality of food as a part of everyday life. Fieldhouse (1986), illustrates this centrality by producing a list of a number of different cultural functions of food. Food, for example, he argues may be used to:

- 1/ Satisfy hunger and nourish the body
- 2/ Initiate and maintain personal and business relationships
- 3/ Demonstrate the nature and extent of relationships
- 4/ Provide a focus for communal activities
- 5/ Express love and caring
- 6/ Express individuality
- 7/ Proclaim the separateness of a group
- 8/ Demonstrate the belongingness of a group
- 9/ Help to cope with psychological and emotional stress
- 10/ Reward or punish
- 11/ Signify social status
- 12/ Bolster self-esteem and gain recognition
- 13/ Wield political and economic power
- 14/ Prevent, diagnose and treat physical illness
- 15/ Prevent, diagnose and treat psychological illness
- 16/ Symbolise emotional experiences
- 17/ Display piety
- 18/ Represent security
- 19/ Express moral sentiments

With so many functions, the significance of food within any culture is accentuated. It is therefore unsurprising that food has become a topic for many competing kinds of analysis.

There are a considerable number of different knowledges of food, each adopting a different substantive focus and underpinned by varying epistemological and ontological concerns. To maintain clarity, I have distinguished between 'individualistic' knowledges, 'consumerist' knowledges, 'culturalist' knowledges and 'critical' knowledges: although work in any of these dimensions often draws upon constructions produced by the others. I don't mean these four forms of knowledge to be considered as definitive, or indeed, internally homogenous. I have used this classification merely as a means of highlighting the broad themes relevant to each.

In undertaking a brief consideration of the kinds of issues addressed within the different forms of knowledge, I am obviously unable to examine in any great depth their varying intricate epistemological (and, indeed, ontological) orientations. However, in considering the kinds of knowledges that have been produced, it is important to make broad reference to the general empirical principles to which each approach subscribes. By making reference to such principles in this way, some of my key concerns regarding existing knowledges of food may be identified. Many of these concerns relate to the models of discourse that are employed. I am not, however, claiming that each of the four knowledges of food adopts a similar stance concerning status of language. Indeed, work that contributes to each of these knowledges is often premised upon very different theories of discourse and addresses language in different ways.

One of the reasons for such differences in the models of discourse that are employed is that those knowledges of food that have been produced derive from a number of different empirical traditions that take different ontological and epistemological stances with regards to the social world. On the one hand, there are those knowledges that draw upon 'positivist' models of science (Silverman, 1993) and assume a *fixed and knowable* social reality that may be measured by careful scientific study: an assumption that is deeply problematic from the social constructivist position I am advocating in this thesis. To researchers working within a 'positivist' paradigm, language is of significance only in terms of its capacity to precisely reflect the nature of social reality by means of reports. Moreover, as the scientific study of a particular phenomenon ultimately involves the operationalisation of only those variables directly relevant to the investigation, the reports elicited are mostly restricted in form. Consequently, the linguistic context within which they were produced is neglected, and their constructed/constructive nature ignored.

On the other hand, there are also knowledges of food that take a very different stance to the nature of the social world, and the role of language and discourse in producing social reality. Such knowledges, while variable in form and by no means homogenous in their ontological and epistemological approach, generally reject 'positivist' assumptions pertaining to a fixed and stable social reality that can be accurately measured by restricted scientific means. Instead, greater attention is paid to the dynamic symbolic values that are culturally accorded to food practices and objects - symbolic values that are constituted through language. Such knowledges thus confer upon language a greater degree of significance, often focusing more attentively upon descriptions that are produced and the culturally available linguistic resources that may be of relevance. However, while such knowledges mesh more comfortably with the constructionist arguments I have proposed (indeed such knowledges are often linked to understandings that provide the basis of the discursive approach I employ), their empirical basis does not often account specifically for the action orientation of talk. Consequently, these knowledges may also be considered somewhat problematic, for they fail to acknowledge the functional basis of language usage. In certain instances this failure is significant in so far as it leads to a neglect of interesting and important variations in formulations produced. In other cases, less attention is paid to the practical activity of talk and the linguistic resources that are drawn upon interactionally in favour of a more abstract analysis which raises different, but equally problematic, issues.

In the following sections I will present a consideration of the different forms of knowledge that have been produced with regards to food. As I have argued, those understandings drawing primarily upon a 'positivist' view of the social world are the most deeply problematic from the constructionist view I advocate. The first knowledge premised upon this understanding of the social world is 'individualistic' in orientation. For the sake of clarity I will first outline some of



its primary dimensions and claims, before outlining my more general concerns pertaining to the understandings that it offers.

#### 1.4 Individualistic knowledges

I am using the term 'individualistic' to refer to knowledges addressing individual processes, such as physiological reactions to particular substances or cognitions concerning specific items.

The majority of the understandings produced within this framework derive from, or are based upon, psychological principles and research. However, one strand of work does stand out as not psychologically orientated. This is nutrition based analysis.

##### 1.4.1 Nutritional approaches

In recent years there has been an increasing amount of academic research undertaken on human nutrition. The focus here is very much upon individual nutritional intake, which is often related to issues of physical health. For example, it has been argued that iron deficiency is a considerable problem for many British infants (Wright, 1989). Nutritional assessments undertaken of Scottish children aged between 1-2 years have suggested that, on average, intake of iron per day is roughly 5.6 milligrams (McKillop and Durnin, 1982). This level is considerably below the Department of Health (1992) recommendation of 6.9 milligrams per day. The haematological based effects of such deficiency can be severe (e.g. extreme fatigue). Yet there is also a degree of concern as to potential immunological impairment and psychomotor development (Scottish Office, 1993). Consequently, nutritionists have called for dietary changes - such as the reduction of whole fat milk which can reduce iron levels by inducing gastrointestinal bleeding in infants to rectify deficiencies in iron and thus improve health.

As an 'individualistic' form of knowledge, the understandings produced by nutritional based analysis address physiological requirements and deficiencies that occur within the body. The methods generally employed vary from self-reports of food intake to actual physical measurement (e.g. weight, analysis of blood). In psychological approaches, a similarly diverse range of methodologies are employed.

#### 1.4.2 Psychological approaches

Historically, the majority of work undertaken on food in the field of psychology has focused on the biological mechanisms (such as hunger or mood) influencing consumption of food and drink (Shepherd, 1989). However, increasingly researchers from other areas of psychology are turning their attention to the topic of food. I will briefly consider work in all of these areas in succession.

##### 1.4.2.1 Psycho-biology

Of primary interest to psycho-biologists is the interplay between biological factors and food behaviours. One common research focus is the relationship between food and mood. Rozin (1982), for example, has proposed that cravings for particular foods may have a biological basis associated with certain depressed mood states. Similarly, Wardle (1993) suggests that much work has been undertaken on the brain structures which allow the initiation and cessation of eating. She argues that this kind of research is of benefit because produces an understanding of how biological cues affect consumption by exploring the onset and manifestation of hunger.

Sensory aspects of food have also been considered within the framework of psycho-biology. Rozin (1976), for example, has claimed on the basis of empirical research that infants have a

natural preference for sweet substances. However, the links between preferences for basic tastes (e.g. sweet, sour etc.) have not been strongly linked to preferences for specific foods such as biscuits (Wardle 1993).

#### 1.4.2.2 Learning

The argument proposed by psychologists working within the area of learning is that analysis of the extent to which food likes and dislikes are learned helps produce an understanding of eating behaviour. Pelchat and Rozin (1982), for example, suggest there are two ways of learning to dislike a particular food. First, physiological reactions such as nausea and vomiting after ingesting a substance can lead to disliking its actual taste and thus not eating it. Second, other reactions such as headaches can lead to an individual avoiding a food out of an awareness of danger, but still reporting a liking for the taste of it.

Generally, most research on learning tends to focus upon infants and pre-school children. A study by Wright (1989), for example, found that 30% of breast feeding mothers encountered difficulties in matching their babies' milk intake to their cues of hunger. In the majority of cases, such babies were female. Consequently, Wright argues if learning about hunger in infancy is an important determinant of eating behaviour in later life (as much research suggests: Bruch, 1974), females may be more likely than males to encounter difficulties in realising and meeting hunger in adulthood. This argument is of direct relevance to another area of research within psychology: the area of disordered eating.

#### 1.4.2.3 Disordered eating

Disordered eating has attracted an increasing amount of attention within psychology due to the prevalence of disorders such as anorexia nervosa and bulimia. Research in this area has focused primarily upon defining the nature and basis of such disorders in relation to the psychopathology of sufferers (Szmukler, 1989). Obesity has also been examined in terms of its psychological basis and attempts made to develop and promote weight reduction techniques. Indeed, it has been proposed that research into abnormal eating may also produce an understanding of how 'normal' eating is maintained (Cummings, 1989).

While abnormal eating is of particular interest to health psychologists due to its links to health, social psychologists have generally concentrated instead upon the examination of individuals' attitudes toward food. This focus derives from their concern to situate the process of food consumption within a social context.

#### 1.4.2.4 Attitude analysis

The desire of an attitude based approach is to examine individual cognitive processes relating to food. As Connor (1993, p.27) proposes, it examines:

rational cognitive processes which take place in the mind of the consumer and mediate the influence of many other variables on food choice.

The focus here is thus upon the internal mental states or cognitive processes through which particular factors (such as gender) may relate to food choice. This approach stems from an attitude model of human cognition developed by social psychologists in recognition of the judgements made by people as part of everyday life. Essentially, this model proposes that such judgements are based upon underlying cognitive predispositions (i.e. attitudes) toward particular

objects. Perhaps the most sophisticated version of this approach was developed by Ajzen and Fishbein (1980). This version, known as the Theory of Reasoned Action, formulates a concept of attitudes (which are defined as having affective, cognitive and behavioural components), but also attempts to predict actual behaviour via measures of perceived behavioural intention.

Intention to behave, according to this approach, is determined by two main factors: the attitude towards a behaviour (e.g. such as eating chocolate is bad) and the subjective norm or perceived social pressure regarding that behaviour (e.g. to eat a chocolate when offered one). More recent work in the area (Ajzen, 1988) has developed this model by adding a measure of perceived behavioural control, which accounts for an individual's perceived ability to perform a particular action (as intentions are a function of an individual's perceived level of control. ) The addition of this measure has resulted in the Theory of Planned Behaviour.

The Theory of Planned Behaviour has been applied and developed by a number of researchers in the area of food. Dennison and Shepherd (1995), for example, have examined adolescent food choice. They report significant differences in attitudes toward foods between adolescents of different genders and ages. For example, females (between the ages of 11-15) had more negative attitudes than boys of the same age toward sweets, chocolate and chips. These female subjects also reported less perceived pressure to eat such foods and a greater level of perceived control over such restraint than boys. As they report a lower intention to consume such items than males, Dennison and Shepherd (1995) argue that this model is useful way of developing an understanding of the attitudinal determinants of adolescent food choice. For example, they suggest that gender may be an important factor because females may have more negative attitudes about foods such as sweets, chocolate and chips as a result of their association with weight gain. Similarly, there may also be less pressure on females to eat such foods due to the social expectation of their expressing a concern to be slim.

### 1.4.3 Individualist knowledges - some reflections

The two approaches I have considered within the broad category of individualist have in common a focus on individual behaviour or predispositions. In nutritional analysis, the focus is generally upon nutritional intake and its relationship with physiological factors. Psychological understandings, by contrast, relate to the biological or cognitive basis of food behaviours. As the focus here is very much upon the individual, both nutritional and psychological approaches depend to a great degree on the reports of respondents, whose responses are formulated as accurate 'measures' of stable underlying states of affairs, such as beliefs or food intake levels. However, as I have argued previously, restricted reports that are treated in this way (as representations of some kind of underlying reality) do not account for the situated and occasioned nature of such representations (e.g. Potter and Wetherell, 1987). Moreover, the assumption that a stable, enduring, and therefore measurable, reality is available to an investigator is considerably problematic. Such an assumption, in knowledges claiming to produce understandings pertaining to the 'individual', is manifest in terms of how such an individual is conceptualised.

In psychology, for example, the individual is generally regarded in humanist terms as an entity with fixed and enduring qualities or traits that can be measured to reflect their true nature (Kitzinger, 1987). The psychological processes of the individual are formulated as distinct from the social realm, and the person is thus regarded as a detached and self-contained entity (Wetherell and Potter, 1992). This is a theme running through psychology and underpins work in such diverse areas as emotion and perception, (Edwards, 1997).

However, if we take the position that all understandings and experiences are constituted in language, it can be proposed that subjectivity is socially constructed (Gavey, 1989). Moreover, the meanings produced in language are not fixed but variable. According to post-structuralist theorists, language is culturally organised into a number of different knowledges or 'discourses' (Foucault, 1972) which constitute a subject, a person, in different ways. It is thus possible to argue that an individual is not a singular humanist self encompassing a number of essential features or enduring underlying traits. As Weedon (1987, p.34) suggests, this discursive approach to the individual instead:

proposes a subjectivity which is precarious, contradictory and in process, constantly being re-constituted in discourse everytime we think or speak...as we acquire language, we learn to give voice - meaning - to our experience and to understand it according to particular ways of thinking...these ways of thinking constitute our consciousness, and the positions with which we identify.

From this orientation, the humanist notion of a subject with essential, fixed qualities is rejected and replaced by a form of subjectivity which is fragmented, inconsistent and contradictory. The individual, as conceived of in terms of fixed and essential underlying cognitive predispositions or behaviours is therefore de-centred (Weedon, 1987). Notions of personhood that propose a central, unitary core must thus be considered problematic. Yet, within Western culture, such notions are common-sensical and certainly manifest within many domains of research on food<sup>5</sup>.

The challenge to the conception of an individual as an enduring entity with fixed underlying traits and dispositions is problematic to individualistic knowledges which generally rely upon such a notion as the basis of their research practice. Moreover, as I have argued, the

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<sup>5</sup> while I regard the de-centering of the subject as a useful theoretical move, it is important to note that I do not undertake the form of discourse analysis proposed by post-structuralist theorists. I will explicate the reasons for this in chapter 2.

epistemological orientation of such approaches is also difficult to substantiate bearing in mind the significance of discourse in constituting the 'individual' and his/her food practices.

While individualistic knowledges focus very much upon the person, consumerist knowledges of food move up a level and attempt to examine some of the key social trends relating to food consumption. However, in common with individualistic knowledges, consumerist approaches generally draw upon a 'positivist' approach that pre-supposes the existence of enduring and measurable food beliefs and practices while neglecting the constructive role of language in constituting these phenomena.

### 1.5 Consumerist knowledges

I have used the term consumerist to refer to knowledges that claim to represent actual food consumption trends and practices. Within this area of work, two distinct approaches can be observed. The first of these attempts to produce an understanding of specific social demographic trends in eating practices. The second examines broader cultural trends affecting consumption patterns. I will first consider socio-demographic work.

#### 1.5.1 The social demographics of food consumption

Understandings produced by research in this area generally relate to the social variables of class, age, region and gender. Many studies, for example, have suggested the existence of significant differences in dietary patterns between social classes (Tomlinson and Warde, 1993) For example, more members of middle socio-economic categories are likely to be vegetarian than others (Fiddes, 1991). Additionally, nutrient intakes, particularly quantity and those such as type of fat and vitamin levels, differ in relation to social class. Lower socio-economic categories



tend to consume a diet that is higher in fat and lower in vitamins than middle and upper range social groupings (Bolton-Smith *et al.*, 1991). Lower social classes tend to consume what is considered to be an unhealthier diet (Scottish Office, 1993).

Age is also reported to be related to food consumption. In one sense, age is only really considered when a comparison can be drawn with a 'normal' adult population, such as during adolescence or old age (e.g. Caughey *et al.*, 1995). Much work in this area has tended to concentrate on these sub-groups, while assuming little age-related difference within the adult population itself (Mennel *et al.*, 1992). A focus upon the elderly, for example, suggested that due to consumption habits, this age group is at greater risk of under-nourishment than the general population (Caughey *et al.*, 1995).

It has also been proposed that food consumption is strongly influenced by region (Blaxter, 1990). Gregory *et al.* (1990), for example, assert that the Scottish population has a lower intake of energy than those living within other UK regions. On the other hand, meat products such as pies are consumed in higher quantities in Scotland as opposed to the rest of the UK (Scottish Office, 1993). Similarly, fruit and vegetable consumption is significantly lower in Scotland than other parts of the United Kingdom (Anderson and Hunt, 1992).

While class, age and region have all been characterised as important variables in the consumption of food, perhaps the most significant social-demographic factor relating to this research is that of gender. There has been a considerable amount of evidence produced that suggests gender is a key factor impacting upon both dietary beliefs and practices. For example, it is argued that there are considerable differences between men and women in the amounts and kinds of foods consumed. Women, in general, are reported to consume a smaller amount of food than men (Gregory *et al.*, 1990). Research has also indicated that women attempt to eat a

healthier diet than men (Lloyd *et al.*, 1993) who consume foods such as meat in larger proportions (Scottish Office, 1993)

These gender differences are important as they may be taken to suggest that men and women have a different relationship to food (e.g. Thorogood and Coulter, 1992). This is a key point for my research as socio-demographic studies highlighting gender as a variable implicitly formulates being a man as a significant basis for specific dietary beliefs and practices. I will develop my consideration of this issue as the chapter progresses.

### 1.5.2 Broader Trends in Food Consumption

While socio-demographic research examines food consumption practices in relation to specific social variables, the other form of consumerist knowledge focuses its attention upon broader trends in eating practices. The majority of work undertaken by theorists working within this area in recent years has highlighted what they claim to be the dynamic nature of eating habits within the United Kingdom. Rather than attempt to discern specific theoretical positions<sup>6</sup>, I will briefly explore what is meant by this proposition and then move on to consider two key areas of focus.

From this position at present our foodways, or food preferences and eating practices, are in a state of flux (Beardsworth and Keil, 1992a). Change in eating practices seems to be both rapid and pervasive. For example, it is suggested that increasing numbers of people are grazing<sup>7</sup> or turning to convenience foods (Gofton, 1992). The rapidity of change in modern eating habits has led Fischler (1988) to argue that modern food is devoid of identity. This, he suggests, is a

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<sup>6</sup> a task that is complicated by the diverse and often unacknowledged influences that underpin many of the arguments that are made.

<sup>7</sup> eating small amounts of food regularly throughout the day.

consequence of complex agri-systems that produce foods without reference to nature or tradition. Fischler argues that food has become an “unidentified edible object” (*op.cit.*, p.289).

Fischler's argument regarding food's lack of identity substantiated his previous assertion (Fischler, 1980) that contemporary food consumption is a form of gastro-anomie. What is meant by this proposition is that traditional rules and norms of food production and consumption have become de-segregated. Consequently, there are increasing levels of uncertainty about what is being eaten and how it fits into a coherent food system.

Change is a significant feature of contemporary culture as a consequence of the increasing emphasis on individuality expressed through consumption (Featherstone, 1991). Consequently, the terms of consumer culture are inherent in the practices and rituals surrounding the selection and consumption of food (Gofton, 1995). The processes of modernity, post-modernity and cultural change that have been observed by many social theorists (e.g., Giddens 1991) are observable within the realms of food: food consumption has become a reflexive exercise that is part of wider individualised lifestyles. Individualised lifestyles demand increasing varieties of foods and places to eat.

It is argued, however, that technological and economic factors may also be relevant in inducing change. These factors can operate the side of either supply or demand (Beardsworth and Keil, 1992a). On the supply side both technological and economic change has resulted in an increasing range and diversity of foodstuffs available (Goodman and Redcliffe, 1991). Food technology has also broken the traditional link between season and availability. Moreover, an expansive transportation infrastructure has allowed a global market to develop for specific fresh foods and the trend toward out of town supermarket shopping has encouraged bulk purchasing of foods designed for longer term storage (Henson, 1992).

On the demand side, factors such as an increase in purchasing power, the increasing move of women into the labour market, and the increasing level of geographical mobility have also all played a part in inducing changes (Beardsworth and Keil 1992a).

In relation to the dynamic culture of food, it is argued that some key behavioural trends can be identified. Many of these can be related to the notions of health and convenience (Gofton and Ness, 1991). As Gofton (1992, p.31) suggests:

UK consumers are using more ready, or semi-prepared foods, but are also more concerned about diet and health. Less time is being spent on shopping, preparing and cooking foods, but there is more diversity in the kinds of foods being bought, and demand for higher quality food.

The significance of convenience is manifest in both an increase in actual convenience foods being eaten (such as pre-prepared meals), and also in terms of the purchase and preparation of food. Technological advances have resulted in many time-saving devices, such as the microwave oven (Goodman and Redcliffe, 1991). These devices allow frozen or pre-prepared foods to be available for eating within minutes, with the minimum level of effort. Similarly, food that is pre-prepared and heated can be purchased from a growing number of take-way outlets throughout the United Kingdom. Such is the popularity of convenience and take-away foods that it is now estimated that over 29% of total energy<sup>8</sup> is provided through the consumption of such products (Gofton, 1995). Moreover, it is not simply convenience or take-away foods eaten within the household that are becoming increasingly popular, but also 'fast-foods' consumed outwith the home (Visser, 1992).

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<sup>8</sup> for the UK population.

Health is becoming an increasing concern for many consumers as the links between food and health have become clear and entered into public discourse. A number of relationships have been established. Chronic diseases such as those of the cardiovascular system (e.g. Oliver, 1987), cancers (e.g. Doll and Peto 1981), and non-cancerous conditions of the bowel have all been related to the intake of certain foods.

In Scotland particularly, the relationship between food and health has been highlighted by health promotion campaigns. Scotland has one of the highest adult mortality rates in Western Europe: with premature death almost twice as likely than in many other Western European countries (Scottish Office, 1993). One of the main reasons for such poor health is the Scottish diet (Anderson and Hunt, 1992). While various national dietary guidelines have been developed and published (e.g. Committee on Medical Aspects of Food Policy, 1984; Scottish Office, 1993), these have been translated into five main areas of dietary change to be promoted by public health bodies (Anderson and Hunt, 1992). These areas are the reduction in visible fat consumption, the reduction of fat in cooking, the reduction in fatty milk consumption, the reduction of high fat food consumption, and an increase in the consumption of fibrous foods.

Healthy eating campaigns promoting these messages can be situated within a wider cultural context demanding healthier lifestyles. As Beardsworth and Keil (1992a, p.6) suggest:

the 1990's are characterised by a philosophy of health which conveys the message not only that we ourselves can influence our health, but also that we have a moral responsibility to do so...the public is exhorted to take personal control of health by adopting prescribed lifestyles.

Certainly, it has been proposed that health is becoming an increasingly important concern in relation to food choice decisions (Scottish Office, 1993). However, this level of concern is

greatest within higher socio-economic groups who express a greater desire to eat healthily and generally do so (Anderson, *et al.*, 1994). A healthier diet can also be linked to other social variables such as gender (e.g. Marshall *et al.*, 1995). Again, this latter proposition stresses the significance of gender in relation to trends impacting upon the consumption of food.

### 1.5.3 Considering consumerist knowledge

As I have considered, consumerist approaches attempt to produce accurate descriptions of food consumption habits in terms of social demographic variables and general cultural trends. While the latter area of focus does attempt to situate consumption within a wider social context, it is how this relates to eating habits that is the primary concern. To examine eating habits and practices, both forms of consumerist knowledge rely to a great degree upon respondents' reports of what they eat and their related perceptions. For example, Marshall *et al.* (1995) undertook a study of responses to ten questions on a self-administered questionnaire by a quota sample of 1011 Scottish adults which they claim *measured* (*op.cit.*, p.19):

public opinion of healthiness in their diet, the healthy and unhealthy attributes, barriers to dietary change, current consumption of fruit and vegetables and their agreement with a range of statements related to consumption and, finally, their rating of nine possible incentives to eat more fruit and vegetables.

The responses to these questions were considered in relation to demographic (social class, age, sex, region) data and sporting activity information. A number of conclusions were made on the basis of this research, such as lower socio-economic groups, those under 35 and over 55 and men are particularly unlikely to consume a high quantity of fruit and vegetables. Conclusions such as these are formulated on the basis of responses to survey reports, which, as I have argued, requires a researcher to manufacture a specific linguistic context within which a

*restricted* report may be elicited. Consequently, in common with individualistic knowledges, these kind of understandings are produced on the basis of an empirical approach that glosses over the functional and constructive nature of language and its significance in constituting social realities. Moreover, the ontological stance underpinning many understandings produced within a consumerist framework, in common with individualistic knowledges, is one assuming the existence of a stable and enduring social reality. This reality is generally conceived of as containing a number of social categories. Indeed, categorisation is a key feature of consumerist research into food practices.

Categories such as age, class and gender are deployed throughout the understandings that are produced within this framework. They are treated as enduring entities about which general assertions may be made on the basis of responses produced by a representative sample of members (Potter and Wetherell 1987). Yet one problem of using categories in this way is that they stress homogeneity and suppress inconsistency and variability: something that would be expected in *reports* produced by members of a category if the functional and constructive nature of language is accounted for. Moreover, the use of singular categories as a basis for classification also detracts from the variable meanings of that category. This is very important in relation to my previous point regarding men. By simply employing a singular category 'men', the multiple and contradictory meanings of this term and the different masculinities that are culturally available may be glossed over (Connell, 1995). Consequently, the singular category men may suppress important and interesting differences within this population.

The supposition that pre-formed categories such as gender are a feature of social life can itself be called into question (Gilbert and Mulkay, 1984). Categories are employed extensively within social scientific knowledges and lay explanations as a means of classification (Antaki, 1994). However as discursive entities, these categories are constructions of the world, not features of

it (Potter, 1996). As constructions, it is possible to argue that they are cultural resources that may be selected and formulated in specific ways to perform particular actions (Potter and Wetherell, 1987). Consequently, their status as existing, homogenous entities must be questioned. A great deal of work has been undertaken on the use of categories in descriptions of the world, both in talk and academic texts (Potter, 1996). The point to recognise here is that the categories employed to describe trends in consumption actually work to *construct* such trends by selecting particular categorisations and formulating these as enduring and pre-formed entities that are internally homogenous. The notion of a singular and specific relationship to food that is shared by men is therefore a construction that may be called into question. Moreover, the proposition that even one man has a unitary set of dietary beliefs and practices that may be represented neutrally through reports (or elicited in other ways) is equally problematic as it fails to recognise the functional and constructive nature of language, and indeed, the fragmentary nature of subjectivity (Weedon, 1987).

I have considered so far both individualist and culturalist forms of knowledge. In doing so I have argued that they draw upon 'positivist' notions conceptualising the individual, and the social world, as entities containing fixed and enduring features that may be measured by scientific investigation. Additionally, I have argued that the basis of those understandings produced within these frameworks are reports that are generally *restricted*, or subject to other techniques designed to reduce variability (Potter and Wetherell, 1987).

A very different form of knowledge that has been produced in relation to food is that of a 'culturalist' orientation. I have used this classification to refer to understandings that pertain specifically to the relationship between food and culture. In other words, the understandings produced do not directly address the precise nature of individual food habits or indeed broader social trends in consumption, but relate instead to the ways in which food fits into an entire



cultural system. They also differ from individualist and consumerist knowledges in a second sense: that of the value accorded to the symbolic dimension of food as a cultural activity. A number of the approaches contributing to a 'culturalist' perspective do not draw upon a 'received' or positivist model of the social world (Silverman, 1993), but are instead embedded within a more interpretivist framework stressing the dynamic nature of culture and the significance of the symbolic meanings attached to particular activities or objects: meanings that are not regarded as inherent to such phenomena but socially constructed. The views of language expoused thus often differ radically to those underpinning the majority of work within individualist and consumerist knowledges.

## 1.6 Culturalist knowledges

There are two main forms of knowledge that I will consider within this framework - structuralism and developmentalism. These both take very different approaches to the relationship between food and culture, focusing on contrasting elements of the dynamic processes involved. For the sake of clarity I will first consider structuralist forms of understanding.

### 1.6.1 Structuralism

According to Lupton (1996, p.8), structuralist theorists take as their starting point the premise that:

individual actions, values, thoughts and identities are largely structured through social norms and expectations which are in turn linked to the broader organisation and structure of societies.

From this position, the form of analysis that is favoured is an examination of particular food consumption practices as a cultural system of communication (Wood, 1995). In other words, food is regarded as a cultural symbol which reflects underpinning social and linguistic structures - a perspective that highlights the significance of the linguistic realm through which everyday activities are constituted and given meaning. Structuralism was an intellectual exercise that spanned a number of different disciplines such as linguistics and anthropology. Consequently, work on food has been undertaken by theorists considering very different questions in relation to the structures that underpin social life.

One of the first theorists to produce work in the area of food from a structuralist perspective was Roland Barthes (1973). Essentially, Barthes was a semiologist interested in the underlying system of differences through which particular objects acquire their meaning. His focus was very much upon the cultural level as he argued that the meaning accorded to a food is defined by its incorporation within a socially structured grammar. This grammar consists of an underlying system of distinctions and rules that enable people to give meaning to particular objects and actions.

To illustrate his argument, Barthes (1973) undertook an analysis of the kinds of cultural meanings attached to steak. While at one level, steak may be culturally regarded as a foodstuff (what semiologists describe as the first level of signification) the *meaning* accorded to it relies upon a second level of distinction. This level, defined by Barthes as mythology situates steak within a social grammar that makes reference to wider cultural notions. In France, for example, steak is a food but at the same time (Barthes 1973, p.63):

effects the best possible ratio between economy and efficacy, between mythology and its multifarious ways of being consumed...there is no alimentary constraint which does

not make the Frenchman dream of steak. Hardly abroad, he feels nostalgia for it.....Being part of the nation, it follows the index of patriotic values: it helps them to rise in wartime, it is the very flesh of the French soldier, the inalienable property which cannot go over to the enemy except in treason.

Steak, at this second level of signification, thus represents French nationhood: in absence and in war. In relation to food, Barthes (1979) also identifies (on the basis of an analysis of advertisements) three main texts which, he argues, underpin the meanings attached to the majority of foods in social settings. The three texts he identifies are history, status and health. History refers to the manner in which food can be seen to allow an involvement in the national past. Status refers to the process by which certain foods are deemed superior or inferior. Health refers to the value of certain foods becoming premised upon their natural or traditional health values. The mythologies culturally relevant to the majority of foods he argues, make reference to one or more of these texts.

Another structuralist theorist concerned with exploring the symbolic dimension of food within a culture was the anthropologist Claude Levi-Strauss (1965). Levi-Strauss is often credited as being one of the key figures in developing a social anthropology of food (Wood, 1995). In contrast to the focus upon the nature of specific mythologies attached to food adopted by Barthes, Levi-Strauss was primarily concerned with examining the precise nature of the underlying rules and constraints through which food consumption comes to represent features of an entire cultural system.

Levi-Strauss takes as his starting point the observation that human beings are both natural and cultural entities. He proposes that this dual nature results in a paradox that is continually confronted by humanity: between natural (e.g. the requirement to eat) and cultural (e.g. sharing a 'symbolic universe') elements. Food is ritually prepared and cooked as a means of making sense of this dual nature. The transformation of raw or rotted (natural) food into cuisine

(cultural) is symbolic, as it represents both natural and cultural aspects of humanity. The ways in which natural foodstuffs are dealt with by a particular food system thus symbolically reflect the culture itself.

By identifying patterns and structures in food practices, an understanding is gained of the rules upon which a particular food system operates. Levi-Strauss also suggests that examining food practices allows an insight into universal and fundamental structures of human thought (Levi-Strauss, 1965) - as all cultures must cope with the same problems arising from humankind's dual nature. He proposes a culinary triangle in an attempt to offer a framework to situate such an examination. The principal components of the culinary triangle are the three states of food: raw, rotted and cooked. These are arranged in relation to binary oppositions such as culture/nature. By cooking raw food, for example, natural substances are transformed into cultural entities: and thus symbolise the dominance of culture over nature. By exploring the symbolic aspects of cultural diets in relation to binary oppositions such as this, it is possible to classify a food system and look for regularities which may be indicative of universal structures of thought.

While still emphasising the symbolic aspect of consumption, Mary Douglas (1975) undertakes a very different form of structuralist analysis and thus produces a very different form of structuralist knowledge. To Douglas, the order and structure of a particular culture is articulated through the minutiae of everyday life. Food, from this orientation, can be examined for the social order it symbolically reflects and re-produces. Consequently, it is the system of rules and constraints governing everyday food practices that are of interest.

Much of Douglas's work has been undertaken on the three-meal system within the United Kingdom. With Nicod (Douglas and Nicod, 1974) she undertook an examination of the way in which food preparation and consumption was organised around the three meals of breakfast,

lunch and dinner. In their study, the researcher, Nicod, lived with twelve working-class families, each for one month or longer, to observe and participate in family eating practices. On the basis of his experiences, Douglas and Nicod (1974) developed a detailed analysis of what they define as a compact and structured system of food provision. Various rules governing specific 'food events' such as meals and snacks were identified. For example, they suggest that meals are ranked in terms of two main criteria: quantity and ceremonial complexity (the latter demonstrated by plate changing and the use of additional utensils). Another proposition that they make concerns the symbolic significance of the biscuit. As they state (*op.cit.*, p.747):

In the sense that brandy is necessary to round off the sequence of wines in a good French meal, so the biscuit is the necessary conclusion to the sequence of cereals in the food system .....the British biscuit is a summing and completion. It is the nearest thing to a stop signal, saying that eating must come to an end.

While structuralist knowledges maintain a very strict focus on the symbolic properties of food, such a concern is very different to those of many theorists working within the developmentalist framework. While recognising the significance of the symbolic aspects of food, they generally treat structuralism as offering a classification scheme for, and not an explanation of, eating practices (Wood 1995). A more appropriate focus for research, they argue, is the way in which particular substances become treated as foods within a culture as a consequence of socio-historical, political, economic and nutritional factors. The understandings produced within this framework reflect such a concern.

#### 1.6.2 Developmentalism

From a developmentalist perspective, eating practices develop over time. It is by examining the factors that affect the development of such practices that their meaning and role within a culture can be accounted for (Mennell, 1985). This approach emphasises socio-historical and material forces that affect or determine food preferences. Developmentalism encompasses a diversity of understandings regarding different aspects of the relationship between food and culture (Wood, 1995).

Harris (1986), for example, proposes that foods offering the greatest benefit over a range of criteria tend to become culturally defined as good to eat. Cultural preferences for particular foods (and their symbolic role within that culture) are thus determined over time on a material cost/benefit basis. He cites the consumption of meat as an example. Harris argues that a cultural preference for meat derives from it being the most nutritionally and economically efficient way by which the physiological needs of those within the culture are met. Consequently, he argues, meat is accorded an important symbolic role within most cultures and is almost a universal preference. The emphasis here is very much upon the development of cultural preferences for certain foods, which according to Harris, are defined pragmatically over time. Yet at the same time, their symbolic significance is highlighted as the upshot of wider socio-historical processes.

Mennell (1985), similarly examines the processes through which specific factors shape cultural preferences for particular foods and the rituals associated with their consumption. In doing so he is interested in identifying what he terms, the “structured processes of change” (1985, p.15) underpinning the development of eating practices. For example, Mennell argues that contrasts between foods eaten in different seasons have been reduced as a consequence of technological innovations such as storage and refrigeration, advanced transportation methods and enhanced agricultural methods. At the same time he suggests other material factors have resulted in increasing varieties of food becoming available. A variety of developments, for instance, have

led to the substantial proliferation of dishes available both within the household (e.g. as pre-packed foods) or from take-aways or restaurants.

### 1.6.3 Culturalist knowledges - some observations

The culturalist knowledges which I have examined focus upon the cultural dimension of food practices and preferences. Developmentalist understandings pertain to the development of cultural preferences and practices over time. Their relative merits and problems are considered by Wood (1995). Structuralism, by contrast, produces understandings highlighting the symbolic role of food, and argues that this reflects underlying social and linguistic structures.

Barthes (1973) for example, from a semiological perspective, highlights the cultural significance of steak and argued that the meanings attached to it derive not simply from its status as a food, but from an underlying socially organised system of distinctions. This system is linguistic in form. Consequently, Barthes highlights the significance of language in relation to food, and stresses the importance of examining the kinds of symbolic meanings that may be attached through language to particular foodstuffs or food-related practices. Douglas (1975) similarly stresses the importance of the symbolic meanings that are *culturally* attached to particular food activities. By focusing upon the symbolic dimension in this way, in contrast to individualist and consumerist knowledges, structuralist theories accentuate the importance of examining the meanings culturally available in relation to food. Moreover, they do not assume a fixed and pre-existing social world focusing instead upon the symbolic means through which social realities and social orders are constructed and consequently re-produced.

With such a focus upon the symbolic dimension, the constructive centrality of language in underpinning social activity is highlighted. Barthes, in particular, focuses specifically upon the

everyday food practices. The analysis provided by Barthes (1973) is particularly important in this respect. He draws attention to the shared linguistic system of conventions and distinctions through which particular foods and food related activities are given meaning. It is thus through language that particular realities are constructed. This is a familiar proposition that resonates with the argument I have been developing so far. However, what Barthes' approach does not do is examine how such constructions are used interactionally and within texts to perform specific functions. This is a significant omission, as language is orientated toward action (Sacks, 1974). The underlying competencies that constitute a system of distinctions are thus best considered in relation to practical linguistic contexts such as talk. It was Barthes' failure to focus upon how language was used that resulted in the methodological criticisms he encountered<sup>9</sup>.

The final form of knowledge I will consider encompasses approaches to the study of food that attempt to develop links between consumption and social inequalities. Drawing upon Lupton (1996), I have defined these approaches as *critical*. Again, the kinds of understanding that have generally been produced within this framework stress the symbolic importance of food as a social activity.

### 1.7 Critical knowledges

Critical work on food has tended to produce understandings in relation to two forms of social inequality: class and gender. In terms of social class, the key figure in this field is Pierre Bourdieu.

#### 1.7.1 Class based analysis

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<sup>9</sup> I will consider a number of different orientations to the examination of language in chapter



Bourdieu's (1984) primary focus is the production and reproduction of social class inequalities through the processes of cultural consumption. Taste, according to Bourdieu is a means of symbolically defining social position. A taste for particular kind of decor, food or clothing is a social marker. Consequently, it is through the expression of taste via consumption practices that social status is defined.

To develop this argument, he draws attention to the connections between various social categories and consumption patterns. On the basis of two large scale questionnaire surveys exploring tastes and cultural practices administered in France during the 1960s, Bourdieu (1984) argues that certain preferences are linked to specific positions within the social system. Food habits and preparation are extremely important to Bourdieu, as he states "one cannot fully understand cultural practices unless...the elaborated taste for the most refined objects is reconnected with the elementary taste for the flavours of food" (1984, p.1). From this perspective, the ways in which food in particular is selected, prepared, served and eaten work to communicate a specific social positioning.

Different tastes for food exhibited and practised over time by social classes enable such classes to remain distinct from one another. In part the nature of these different tastes derives from the material conditions of existence experienced by a class. For example, higher status groups may prefer 'nouvelle cuisine' because they are able to consume food on the basis of cultivated pleasure rather than necessity (Miller, 1987). However, more important in defining taste is the process of distinction (Bourdieu, 1984) through which one social group experiences feelings of revulsion and social difference when encountering the tastes of another. Tastes for food are thus conceived of more in terms of a refusal of other tastes than positive preferences.

The differences in tastes between classes work to legitimate and reproduce particular social relationships (of dominance and subordination) as certain tastes are accorded higher social value than others. Those in a position of economic and cultural power, Bourdieu (1984) asserts, legitimise their own tastes and devalue the tastes of others. An important part of this process is the inculcation of individuals into the 'tastes' of their particular social category. The mechanism through which this occurs is defined by Bourdieu (1984) as the 'habitus' - a set of learned dispositions encompassing particular cognitive categories and physical styles, such as eating habits. The habitus is learned during childhood within a family context, and subsequently developed or undermined during the education process.

While Bourdieu's focus is the reproduction of social inequalities through cultural consumption (e.g. in relation to food) his main area of concern is class relations. Consequently, he does not address how the processes of consumption work to reproduce other forms of inequality, such as gender (Moore, 1993). However, a second strand of critical work in relation to food does address gender inequalities within this domain. Feminist research on food highlights men's power over women in the arena of food.

### 1.7.2 Feminist Orientations

There are two primary topics upon which feminist analysis has concentrated: food in the household, and food and body image/weight. The arguments produced generally highlight the inequalities encountered by women within these domains. However, what this analysis also does is accentuate the significance of gender in relation to food.

Many studies undertaken on the household context have proposed that it is usually the responsibility of women to prepare and cook food (e.g. Delphy, 1979; Charles and Kerr, 1988).

However, it has been argued that this cannot be taken to indicate that women have the power to decide what is eaten. These decisions are made by the woman in accordance with the preferences of the other members of the household and particularly the male (Thorogood and Coulter, 1992). Consequently, in many instances women cook for men, which may be problematic. Charles and Kerr (1988), for example, empirically demonstrate what they claim to be the ways in which catering for men's preferences can lead to women subordinating their own desires for particular foods. As men's preferences are often less healthy than women's (Pill and Parry 1989), many women may be forced to eat less healthy food against their own wishes. The only alternative to doing so may be to prepare different meals for different members of the household: something that requires additional time and resources.

By raising the issue of health in this way an additional problem becomes apparent. As one aspect of the female role involves responsibility for the family's health (Blaxter, 1990), a dilemma often emerges between providing food in accordance with current healthy eating advice and those foods preferred by other members of the household (Pill and Parry, 1989).

The second area of focus for feminist research on food examines some of the more general problems faced by women in relation to food and body and draws attention to the links between these problems and the structural inequalities arising from the construction of femininity within western culture. As Charles and Kerr (1988, p.230) argue:

While women are feeding men and children wholesome, nourishing food, they are denying it to themselves in the interests of maintaining a usually un-naturally slim body image.

For many women, weight and body are regarded as problematic. Researchers such as Orbach (1978) and Chernin (1981) have highlighted the problems faced by women as a result of cultural demands to be, and to remain, slim. In contrast to men, women are objects of gaze (Berger, 1972) and are thus expected to conform to aesthetic ideals. With great emphasis being placed upon the aesthetic, women are under pressure to live up to the standards of beauty defined by Western culture at any specific period of time. At present, such standards emphasise body shape and size. Magazines and media images abound promulgating sliminess and attractiveness as inherently interlinked (Hughes, 1990). As a consequence, Lawrence (1984) argues, food is problematic for all women. It is one of the primary means through which a slim body can be achieved and maintained.

### 1.7.3 Critical knowledges - reflections

While these two critical understandings both address the relationship between food and particular social inequalities, they do so in very different ways. Bourdieu, in examining the reproduction of class tastes, produces an entire theory of consumption that is situated within a contemporary social context. Feminist approaches, by contrast, focus specifically upon food as a site of social inequality - attempting to examine the dynamics within the household context, and the problems faced by women more generally in terms of a pressure to maintain a slim body. Yet while they are distinct in this manner, both these forms of critical knowledge stress the symbolic nature of food practices and their relationship to wider cultural processes. Murcott (1982), for example, argues that the provision by women of a 'cooked dinner' works to symbolically represent and re-produce the patriarchal power relationships inherent within working class families in South Wales. Similarly, Bourdieu proposes that it is symbolic values attached to particular forms of consumption that enable social positions to be distinguished and maintained.

By accentuating the symbolic domain, both feminist and class based forms of analysis focus upon the meanings attached to particular food objects and practices, and thus acknowledge their constructed nature. In feminist knowledges, this focus translates empirically into an interpretivist, qualitative approach which values women's ideas and experiences as expressed in talk. Yet while such a view of language is useful and enables a deeper analysis of the meanings relevant to many women, the majority of feminist research in the area of food has tended to take a generally realist approach to the talk that is studied. In other words, women's descriptions and claims are treated as accurate representations of their experiences. For example, Charles and Kerr (1988) premise their claim that many women's food preferences are subordinate within the household on descriptions of food distribution produced in semi-structured interviews with 200 working class women. These descriptions are not treated as functional and constructive entities produced within a specific interactional context, but instead as reflections of existing states of affairs. As I have argued, this orientation towards descriptions and reports is problematic as it requires the researcher to suppress variation in accounts: detracting from what participants may actually be saying and potentially imposing the researchers common-sense understandings upon the accounts produced (Zimmerman and Pollner, 1971).

A deeper concern may be raised with regards to approach of Bourdieu (1984), who produces as evidence for his assertion that taste and social position are linked the results of a large scale survey administered in France during the 1960s. In contrast to the interpretivist epistemological approach generally favoured by feminist theorists, Bourdieu pays less attention to what respondents say in talk preferring instead to elicit a written report in response to specific survey questions. Such an approach pays little attention to the functional and constructive nature of the formulations produced by respondents and thus glosses over the language through which the social world is constructed. Essentially, the kind of survey methodology employed is embedded

within a positivist orientation toward the social world which, as I have argued previously, neglects the significance of language in the social construction of reality.

#### 1.8 A question of taste - knowledges of food reconsidered

The knowledges of food that I have considered produce a number of different understandings that work to construct 'food' in different ways. Individualist knowledges provide constructions of food relating to various internal states and individual behaviours. Consumerist knowledges, by contrast, offer an assessment of trends in food practices on a social level. Both these knowledges, as I have argued, are deeply problematic from a social constructionist position as a consequence of their 'positivist' assumptions and their failure to acknowledge the symbolic and constructed nature of food as a social phenomenon. The view of language adopted by these approaches is deeply problematic as a consequence of this neglect.

Culturalist knowledges, by contrast, have produced understandings of both the symbolic role of food and of the underlying structures that underpin such meanings, in addition to the material processes through which particular foods become culturally favoured. Similarly, critical knowledges of food recognise the symbolic dimension of food, but take as their starting point a desire to examine the ways in which inequalities are manifest or reproduced in food preferences and practices. Both these knowledges, as I have argued, mesh more readily with the social constructionist position that I am proposing within this thesis. Furthermore, in adopting a stance that often accentuates the symbolic significance of food, the role of language in constructing meaning is highlighted. Yet, as I have also suggested, many of the understandings produced have not attended to the ways in which language is *used interactionally* to construct food as a social phenomenon. This is problematic as it only through such a focus that the culturally available linguistic resources relevant to a range of members of that culture may be examined.

In considering the understandings produced within these knowledges, I have inevitably glossed over a number of contradictions and contestations that exist between, and within, these different areas of focus. For example, the relationship between structuralist understandings and developmentalist understandings, both what I have termed culturalist knowledges, is often considered one of antagonism as structuralists highlight underlying structures of meaning that underpin food practices whereas developmentalists stress the material basis of food preferences and their development over time (Wood, 1995). Moreover, even within particular forms of knowledge a variety of different theoretical positions may be manifest. Within feminist knowledges, for instance, the work of theorists such as Chernin (1985) and Orbach (1978) clash in relation to their understanding of the nature and basis of women's problematic relationship to food and body<sup>10</sup>.

### 1.9 Constructing new knowledge

As I described in the first section of this chapter, the original questions I was interested in exploring regarded men's dietary practices, and the beliefs that underpinned these. However, in undertaking an ethnographic pilot I encountered problems that required me, as I have described, to reconsider my approach and turn instead to look at the construction of accounts of food. I have developed my case for doing so in relation to existing knowledges of food: by highlighting their general neglect of the functional and constructive role of language in social life while at the same time acknowledging their different orientations toward the study of language. Essentially, my proposition is that attempting to examine an underlying reality by way of reports is not a practical methodology because the intention (examining reality) can never be accomplished as a

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<sup>10</sup> Orbach argues that women need to learn to eat on the basis of 'stomach-hunger' to return to their naturally thin state. Chernin argues that women have naturally large bodies that are slim and childlike in accordance with cultural ideals - ideals that derive from male domination.

consequence of the action orientation of language. Rather than take real beliefs and practices as my focus, a more fruitful form of analysis is therefore to examine the ways in which these are constructed and addressed in talk. In doing so, I am able to recognise the functional and constructive nature of language to examine the kinds of actions performed and the culturally available linguistic resources employed.

There is also a second issue here as to why an examination of men's accounts of food is valuable and interesting topic for research. My argument throughout this chapter has been that gender is formulated by existing research as a significant issue impacting upon an individual's relationship to food. Initially, my concern to examine men's dietary beliefs and practices stemmed from a number of observations connected with men's power within the household and the importance accorded to their preferences by women. Moreover, the links between diet and health that are increasingly stressed by academic knowledges and public bodies accentuate the degree to which dietary change is important if adult mortality rates amongst both men and women are to fall. As, it is argued, that men have less healthy preferences than women - preferences that often determine household eating - it has been proposed that focus upon men's dietary beliefs and practices is essential (Thorogood and Coulter, 1992).

Such a focus upon the 'reality' of men's relationship to food is problematic. Moreover, the contention that men are a singular and pre-existing category with regards to food is a *construction* employed by researchers alongside methodologies that are generally designed to suppress variability in accounts. The *variable* meanings and constructions of food produced by those categorised as 'men' has not been a focus for much analysis. Such a focus is important if it is the *participant's orientation* that is of interest, as opposed to the analysts. To examine men's orientation in relation to food requires a methodology that does not attempt to generate a singular consistent account, but instead considers the variable actions performed and



constructions produced in talk. From such a perspective, constructions of gender will only be relevant if they are *made relevant* by respondents themselves. This enables the researcher to avoid the imposition of often common-sensical categories on the data and thus provide a reading of the culturally available communicative competencies and reasoning procedures that are employed in accounts. It is such a discourse analytic position that I adopt in this study.

While much research upon men in relation to food is perhaps subject to many of the epistemological problems that I have considered, I do wish to stress a second point regarding existing knowledges. That is the lack of research that has been undertaken focusing *specifically* upon men and food. The majority of work that has been carried out on the relationship between gender and food has focused upon women. The basis for this state of affairs is the important observation that many women experience a problematic relationship to food as a consequence of the social inequalities that are manifest within a number of domains (e.g. the household context: Pahl, 1984). As men occupy a different social position, the implicit argument here is that they do not encounter many such problems. In other words, it is assumed that men have a *different* relationship to food as a consequence of their gender. However, the basis of this claim is often intuitive as little or no research focusing *specifically* upon gender actually involves men (e.g. McKie *et al.*, 1993: Price and Sephton, 1991: Thorogood and Coulter, 1992). Moreover, the *nature* of men's relationship to food is often implicitly formulated on the basis of women's descriptions of it. For example, Charles and Kerr (1988), undertook an empirical examination of the dietary beliefs and practices of 200 working class women. On the basis of this study, a number of aspects of men's dietary practices were reported - such as consumption levels of foods such as meat and their lack of involvement in household tasks such as cooking.

My point here is that gender has been constructed by existing knowledges of food as of considerable significance. However, this construction has been produced by research that

suppresses the variability of responses of both men and women, and that has not, as yet, focused upon what men themselves actually say. Such a focus is important for a number of reasons. However, before considering these it is useful to consider what I mean by the term 'men'.

In common-sense terms, 'men' is generally used to refer to a singular, enduring and existing category. However, as I have argued, such a categorisation glosses over the variable and competing constructions that may be produced by those within this population. Moreover, it detracts from the complex and contradictory 'masculinities' (Connell, 1995) that may be culturally available. Men are also often formulated in 'humanist' (Kitzinger, 1987) terms that posits an essential 'masculine' essence within an individual. This construction has been undermined by post-structuralist theorists (e.g. Weedon, 1987) who propose that subjectivity is fragmentary and contradictory. Consequently, different constructions and modes of masculinity may be relevant to an individual at different moments in time (Gavey, 1989).

For these reasons, regarding men as a unitary category, or as even as individuals with specific and fixed traits is problematic. However, this cannot be taken to mean that subjectivity or identity is formed from scratch on a moment to moment basis. Viewing men as a number of culturally available masculine identities that are enmeshed with particular social practices and have become 'sedimented discursive practices' (Wetherell and Potter, 1992) is, I contend, more helpful. This view enables the fluidity of identity proposed by post-structuralism to be acknowledged while at the same time recognising the continuity that arises from specific subjectivities and identities becoming practised over time.

While this conception of 'men' is more relevant than the unitary and homogenous category implied by my previous desire to examine men's dietary beliefs and practices, it is important to emphasise that the focus of this research is talk about food. Consequently, notions of masculinity

or identity will only be relevant if orientated toward by *speakers* in their explanations and accounts. However, as I have suggested, there are still a number of important reasons why focusing upon men's talk about food is an interesting and important area for research.

One feature of many of the understandings of food that have been produced is the significance of gender in relation to preferences. It has been commonly argued (e.g. Pill and Parry, 1989) that men have specific food preferences that are less healthy than women. Moreover, many understandings have constructed men's preferences as strongly related to particular notions of masculinity (Lupton, 1996). Yet, other forms of knowledge, academic or common-sensical, may also be relevant in talk about food preferences: such as health concerns, material factors etc. Consequently, there is a complexity and diversity of issues pertaining to particular foods that makes an examination men's accounts an interesting exercise.

By examining the actions performed and the constructions produced in accounts regarding particular foods, it is possible to consider the kinds of discursive topics (i.e. interactional issues orientated toward) and linguistic resources (Edwards and Potter, 1992) that are displayed as relevant by men in a particular interactional context. These can then be considered in terms of their resonance with existing knowledges and constructions of such foods.

A second common area of focus in relation to food is its problematic dimension. Theorists such as Lawrence (1984) have argued that all women experience a problematic relationship to food as a result of cultural demands to be slim. These demands, it is argued, stem from women's structural position within society. Consequently, as I have argued, the implicit proposition produced within feminist understandings such as these is that men's relationship to food is less problematic as a result of their differential social positioning.

In contrast to this, in recent years a number of understandings have been produced regarding the relationship between food, weight and health that is of relevance to both men and women. Additionally, there has also been increasing academic discourse regarding the increasing significance of body-image for men. However, there has been very little analysis of how men themselves construct issues such as a concern about weight in accounts. Again, by undertaking an examination of men's talk it is possible to examine the interactional concerns of participants in relation to these topics.

The third area of focus in relation to food that has been highlighted by previous research is the household context. As I have briefly outlined, feminist understandings have formulated the household as a domain within which social inequalities between men and women are manifest. It is argued that women cook for men's preferences, and are generally responsible for maintaining this arena (e.g. Delphy, 1979). In relation to these arguments there are two related reasons for examining men's accounts. First, feminist understandings that highlight inequalities constitute one specific form of knowledge regarding this domain. Contrasting understandings and formulations of tasks such as cooking and shopping may also be resources employed within talk. Consequently, by examining the construction of accounts, it is possible to examine the 'topics' that are of displayed as interactionally relevant by men.

The second reason for examining men's explanations stems from the proposition that it is within talk that specific inequalities may be constructed and legitimated (Adams *et al.*, 1995). By considering specifically the constructions produced and descriptive strategies employed in accounts, the kinds of culturally available resources that act to maintain and legitimate inequalities, such as justifications for not being involved in household tasks, may be explored. These 'practical ideologies' (Wetherell *et al.*, 1987) may play an important role in producing

and legitimating the unequal power relationship between men and women and thus constitute an important topic of study.

The final area of interest in relation to men's accounts of food is eating out. Consumerist knowledges highlight the growing significance of convenience as a trend within eating practices. This is manifest in many domains, but perhaps most significantly in the increasing number of fast food restaurants such as MacDonalds (Ritzer, 1993). Such restaurants may particularly appeal to men who it is claimed eat more food out of the house than women (Blaxter, 1990). Moreover, the meat based products served within fast food outlets are also of relevance to men as a consequence of their higher level of meat consumption more generally (Beardsworth and Keil, 1991). There is currently little research in this area that examines how fast food is constructed by respondents in talk - particularly men. Consequently, it seems important to undertake such an analysis.

#### 1.10 The story so far - summary and aims

In this chapter I have argued that there is a need to examine men's talk about food from a discourse analytic perspective. My argument has involved highlighting the functional and constructive nature of language. I have also briefly examined the epistemological basis of existing knowledges of food and asserted that the orientations generally adopted are problematic. On the one hand there are those knowledges that adopt a 'positivist' stance and ignore the constructed nature of social phenomena in addition to the role played by language in the process of construction. On the other hand there are those knowledges that accentuate the symbolic realm and often stress the importance of language in the production of meaning. However, although this latter approach meshes more comfortably than the former with my constructionist argument, it fails to account for the action orientation of language usage. Consequently, my proposition is that the most appropriate method for examining food is to consider the ways

language is used interactionally to construct food in accounts. This, as I have explained, is particularly relevant for men.

My aim in this research is to examine men's talk about food from a discourse analytic perspective. To fulfil this aim, I will consider talk in relation to the four topics of preferences, aspects that may be considered problematic, the household context and eating out. Before undertaking this analysis, however, I will consider in more depth some methodological issues pertaining to the examination of talk. Doing so will allow me to delineate the nature and basis of my approach to the collection and analysis of men's accounts.

## **CHAPTER TWO**

## 2.0 A discursive approach to food: a myriad of methods

In this chapter I will examine some of the different ways in which men's talk about food may be analysed. As I argued in the previous chapter, my primary concern in this study is to consider the discursive actions of participants when talking about food. However, such actions can be considered in a number of ways (Antaki, 1994). It is possible, for example, to work upon a linguistic level by examining the culturally available structures and competencies (e.g. Garfinkel, 1967) that enable actions in talk to be performed. Alternatively, it is possible to adopt a stance that examines in detail the actions being performed in relation to the culturally shared resources (or tacit reasoning procedures) that seem to inform them (e.g. Widdicombe, 1993). A less detailed focus upon the actions undertaken may be adopted if the desire is primarily to examine the *content* of discourse and explicate the nature of the 'interpretative repertoires' that are employed (e.g. Gill, 1993). Finally, specific actions undertaken in talk may be glossed over in favour of a critical examination of the systems of meaning or discourses that inhabit a particular 'text' or account (e.g. Parker, 1992). In the following discussion I will briefly consider these different orientations in relation to their suitability for this research.

The first approach I will explore is conversation analysis. This perspective is situated within an ethnomethodological framework (e.g. Garfinkel, 1967) which proposes that social order is produced and maintained through everyday social interaction. Before commencing my examination of this approach, it is important to make the point that conversation analysis has provided a number of important insights into the nature of language. It is thus considered one of the antecedents of discourse analysis in general (Potter and Wetherell, 1987). Consequently, my consideration will touch upon some issues regarding language that I discussed in the previous chapter. Yet, while conversation analysis is regarded as important in this respect, it has a very specific focus upon the structural aspects of talk. As such, my contention will be that it is not a suitable orientation to adopt in examining men's talk *about food*.



## 2.1 The technology of talk: conversation analysis

The starting point for conversation analysis is that language has a 'bedrock' status in social life (Sacks, 1974). Talk plays a central role in the production and maintenance of social order and thus constitutes an important topic of study. Analysts focus upon the ordered nature of language use and draw attention to the rules of coherence (Antaki, 1994) through which utterances are designed to perform particular, interactionally relevant, functions (Potter, 1996).

As language is functional (Garfinkel, 1967), the focus for conversational analysts is the ways in which talk is sequentially *organised* to perform specific actions. Conversation analysts argue that the actions performed by utterances can only be understood in relation to their immediate sequential context. The meaning of a particular utterance is thus indexed to the sequence of talk within which it is embedded (Psathas, 1995). This notion of indexicality (Garfinkel, 1967) has resulted in a focus upon *sequences* of talk rather than single utterances detached from their interactional context (as preferred by speech act theorists: e.g. Austin, 1962). In examining sequences of talk within interactional contexts, conversation analysts have highlighted the importance of turn-taking - the primary mechanism through which everyday conversation is managed and order produced. However, as Wooffitt (1992, p.48) suggests:

This focus is not informed by any theoretical pre-suppositions about the 'nature' of conversation or the best way to study it. Rather, it reflects the ways that participants themselves use the turn-by-turn development of the conversation as a resource to display and maintain its orderliness.

The point here is that conversation analysis examines how order is produced and maintained within interactions in terms of the practices of participants (Antaki, 1994). Turn-taking within conversations is a resource through which interactional order is maintained (Sacks *et al.*, 1974). By focusing upon how talk is organised, analysts stress the systematic structures which are employed by conversationalists in everyday interaction. These systematic properties are regarded as socially organised and culturally available communicative competencies that enable

social actions to be performed in talk (Garfinkel, 1967). As Wooffitt (1992) suggests, they are both “resources for, and the vehicles of, social action” (p.49). Consequently, in the words of Heritage and Atkinson (1984, p.1):

The central goal of conversation analytic research is the description and explication of the competencies that ordinary speakers use and rely on in participating in intelligible, socially organised interaction.

An example of such communicative competencies is the adjacency pair. This mechanism is two utterances that are adjacent, provided by different speakers, ordered and typed so that a first part necessitates a second part (Schegloff and Sacks, 1973). One familiar adjacency pairing is a question and answer sequence, where a first part (question) produced by one speaker requires a second part (answer) from another on the basis of a normative understanding of such a pairing. It is the participants' *shared* understanding of competencies such as these that enables order to be produced and maintained within an interaction. Consequently, to examine the ways in which social actions are performed in talk, conversation analysts have focused upon culturally available competencies: the structures, machinery, organised practices and formal procedures through which order is produced (Pasthas, 1995).

By exploring the structural properties of language that enable order to be produced, analysts have provided a number of important insights into the nature of talk. However, by focusing specifically upon the competencies that enable social actions to take place, their concern is primarily with the *technology* of conversation (Sacks, 1992). This is a somewhat different focus to the one I wish to adopt in examining the actions performed by men in talk about food. While I am interested in examining the ways in which participants perform specific functions, I am less concerned with explicating the technical details of the competencies through which these functions are performed. Moreover, I am also keen to retain a sense of the constructive nature of language (e.g. Gilbert and Mulkay, 1984) and am thus interested in the constructions

produced by participants and the 'reasoning procedures' that seem to inform these. As Widdicombe (1993) suggests, talk is organised sequentially but is also (*op.cit.*, p.97):

organised according to culturally available but tacit 'reasoning procedures' which seem to inform a speaker's use of resources such as specific words, phrases or illustrative examples. That is, utterances seem to display a sensitivity to the kinds of inferences that are thereby made available, and others that are thereby avoided.

The 'reasoning procedures' that inform the selection of particular cultural resources are an important consideration in examining the discursive practices of participants. An examination of such reasoning procedures enables the actions performed in talk to be situated within a wider cultural context (Antaki, 1994). Issues relating to their basis and effect as *social* actions may thus be explored in a culturally informed manner. Moreover, the kinds of practices undertaken in discourse may be more clearly understood by analysts on the basis of their shared understanding of the cultural notions informing talk. In other words, to fully explicate the nature and basis of discursive actions, the analyst has to employ his/her understanding of the culturally available reasoning procedures that seem relevant to the constructions produced. Cutting off this cultural dimension to focus entirely upon shared competencies in relation to the *structural properties* of language (as in conversation analysis) may obscure some interesting and important features of discourse.

As a result of the dis-juncture between my orientation towards men's talk about food and the approach to language use generally adopted by conversation analysts, I have not adopted a conversation analytic approach within this research. In contrast to the 'micro' orientation of conversation analysts, a very different approach to accounts is proposed by those working within post-structuralism. From this perspective, accounts of food are 'texts' (Parker, 1992) that may be analysed for the discourses, or systems of meaning, residing within them.

## 2.2 Discourse and power: a post-structuralist approach.

Post-structuralist discourse analysts take an explicit socio-political stance in their analytic practice. This stance is premised upon their understanding of a *discourse* which, according to Parker (1990, p.191) is a “system of statements which constructs an object”. Such an understanding derives from work undertaken within the post-structuralist framework but most importantly from the arguments made by Foucault (1972). Post-structuralism has highlighted the ways in which language constitutes our understandings and knowledges of reality, ourselves and our subjectivities (Burman, 1991). It has also, and importantly, stressed the degree to which discourses and material practices are enmeshed. The medical discourse, for example, not only constitutes a particular system of meaning, but is also implicated within the structure of a number of institutions (e.g. hospitals) and material practices (e.g. operations). Indeed, Foucault (1972) proposed that all material practices are invested with meaning and thus can be considered as discursive.

Discourses, as systems of meaning, are generally structured in accordance with existing power relationships. These discourses are realised in texts, which can be defined as “delimited tissues of meaning reproduced in any form that can be given an interpretative gloss” (Parker, 1992, p.6). Such texts can thus include anything to which we attach meaning (e.g. verbal accounts, games, sports etc.). Analysts focus their attention on the exercise of power via discourses located in texts. This involves viewing a discourse as not only constituting specific ‘objects’, but also as a topic of examination in its own right. Discourses are examined in terms of the ways in which they work to reproduce social inequalities. A post-structuralist approach can thus be described as *critical* as result of its overtly political stance (Fairclough, 1985). As van Dijk (1993, p.250) describes:

Critical discourse analysts take an explicit socio-political stance...Their hope, if occasionally illusory, is change through political understanding. Their perspective, if possible, that of those who suffer most from dominance and inequality. Their critical targets are the power elites that enact, sustain, legitimate, condone or ignore social inequality and injustice.

Identifying discourses for this purpose involves a number of steps (Parker, 1992) such as examining the objects that are referred to and constructed, considering the ways in which subjects are positioned, exploring how, where and when they were produced, and considering the ways in which discourses refer to one another. Once these steps have been performed and discourses particularised, from this perspective three further aspects *must* be examined (Parker, 1990). First are the ways in which discourses support certain institutions, second the specific power relationships that they reproduce, and finally their ideological effects in justifying and sanctioning oppression.

There have been many analyses based upon, or informed by, this post structuralist approach to discourse. Perhaps the most relevant of these, in relation to food, is that provided by Hepworth and Griffin (1990). These authors, identify five discourses through which Anorexia Nervosa was 'discovered' in the nineteenth century as a medical condition associated with women. On the basis of an examination of 'texts' (written articles) produced by the two physicians generally associated with the 'discovery' of anorexia, they propose that discourses of femininity, medicine/science, clinical, discovery and hysteria worked to (*op.cit.*, p.321):

medicalise self-starvation within a hegemonic ideology which presented anorexia nervosa as a typically feminine condition. Anorexia became a 'natural' corollary of feminine irrationality.

In undertaking their analysis, Hepworth and Griffin (1990) examine how these discourses reflect unequal relations of power and thus subordinate women. For example, they argue that nineteenth century discourses of femininity construct women as irrational and emotionally unstable. Women were consequently regarded as lacking intellectual and rational capabilities and forced to live an entirely domestic (and powerless) existence. In conducting an examination

of the discursive construction of anorexia, the authors are able to highlight its social basis and consider the ways in which it still works to uphold and legitimate particular power relationships.

Although I have considered as an example the analysis of written texts, post-structuralist discourse analysis is often undertaken upon accounts (e.g. Marks, 1993). It is, therefore, a potential means of analysing men's talk about food. However, there are a number of difficulties that arise in relation to this approach that undermine its suitability for my research examining men's talk about food. The first of these relates to its conceptualisation of discourse.

As I have argued, post-structuralist analysts view language as structured through discourses which mostly reflect unequal power relationships. Such relationships are produced by a society's economic and material infrastructure. Consequently, the very notion of a discourse in this respect is socio-political (Widdicombe and Wooffitt, 1995). Embedded within it are assumptions regarding the structural basis of inequality and its relationship to language (which, discursively, supports institutions and has ideological effects). To engage in this form of analysis, a specific political stance is adopted that takes the reproduction of power inequalities as its central focus. If, as in the case with this research, questions that do not necessarily relate so *explicitly* to the exercise of power are of greater analytic interest, a critical approach to discourse seems inappropriate.

A second problem with regards to notions of specific discourses is the tendency for reification (Potter *et al.*, 1990). In other words, to formulate a discourse as a coherent and systematic entity (as a set of statements) can work to objectify that discourse and attribute to it causal status. A discourse, in this sense, may be seen as constructing objects in an abstract realm that is detached from situated practices. This is problematic because it ignores the way in which talk (and text) are orientated toward action. As Potter *et al.* (1990, p.209) argue:

Discourses...are always versions organised in particular contexts, their study should be based around the performance of procedures or actions.

To consider statements (i.e. that constitute an object) detached from the interactional context within which they were produced fails to capture the way in which objects are constructed as part of situated, interactional practices. Moreover, by ignoring the actions performed by interactants in talk, the basis upon which discourses are delineated is often not fully explicated. This can result in ascriptivism, which, as Widdicombe and Woofitt (1995, p.62) suggest, involves:

imputing a discourse to texts (or bits of speech and writing) without explicating the basis for that imputation.

By glossing over the action orientation of language in search of discourses, post-structuralist analysts may impose their common-sense assumptions upon the analysis (Potter *et al.*, 1990). In doing so they downgrade the significance of the social actions performed in talk in favour of their own critical readings of the text. Interactants may thus, and ironically, be dis-empowered. Their actions in talk are not noted (Widdicombe, 1995).

As I have argued, a post-structuralist approach to analysing accounts is not appropriate for examining men's talk about food. It does not take account of the *discursive actions* performed by speakers, treating the construction of objects by discourses as a direct and automatic process. It also adopts an explicit socio-political standpoint in terms of both its understanding of language (and discourse), and its analytic practice. This standpoint is not one I share in *this examination* of men's talk about food<sup>1</sup>.

### 2.3 Dancing in discourse: a repertoire of moves

While the examination of discourses from a post-structuralist position tends to gloss over the actions being performed in talk, the notion of interpretative repertoires has been proposed as a

means of resolving this concern yet at the same time retaining a sense of the constructive and culturally organised nature of language. This approach, outlined initially by Gilbert and Mulkay (1984) and subsequently developed by Potter and Wetherell (1987), is formulated as a means of examining the *content* of the culturally available resources that may be drawn upon in accounts. In contrast to post-structuralist analysis of discourses however, the emphasis here is upon the use of these resources as part of situated, discursive practices. In other words, as Wetherell and Potter (1992, p.91) suggest:

Interpretative repertoires are pre-eminently a way of understanding the content of discourse and how that content is organised. Although stylistic and grammatical differences are sometimes closely associated with this organisation, our analytic focus is not a linguistic one: it is concerned with language use, what is achieved by that use and the nature of the interpretative resources that allow that achievement.

Interpretative repertoires are conceived of as the culturally organised resources that enable specific actions to be performed in talk. They are the building blocks through which particular versions are manufactured in accounts (Wetherell and Potter, 1992) and can be considered as “broadly discernible clusters of terms, descriptions...and figures of speech often clustered around metaphors or vivid images and often using distinct grammatical constructions and styles” (Potter *et al.*, 1990). It is both the nature of the repertoire, and its interactional functions that are of interest to analysts.

Marshall and Raabe (1993), for instance, identify the use of two interpretative repertoires by respondents of differing political affiliation when talking about nationalisation and privatisation. An example of one of these is the ‘efficiency’ repertoire, which was a common resource drawn upon variably by both conservative and liberal participants in their study. While efficiency was generally formulated vaguely but as a good thing, conservative participants mostly employed this repertoire as a means of justifying their support for privatisation. In contrast, liberal participants mostly used the efficiency repertoire in a manner that did not presume that efficiency was a basis

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<sup>1</sup> I do, however, share many of the critical desires of post-structuralist analysts and do not



for privatisation. Their likely objective in doing so, claim the authors, was to break any potential link between efficiency and privatisation.

By focusing upon the repertoires employed within discourse, analysts are able to examine the kinds of interpretative resources that may be culturally available, and the functions are these used to perform interactionally. The notion of a repertoire, in this respect (Potter *et al.*, 1990, p.212):

encompasses the way that different moves (terms, tropes, metaphors) from the repertoire may be invoked according to their suitability to an immediate context. That is, the idea of a repertoire spotlights flexibility of use in practice.

It is this flexibility in practice that enables analysts to claim that interpretative repertoires reconcile the functional orientation of language (and thus discursive practice) with the *content* of the resources that may be drawn upon in the course of interaction. While a focus upon repertoires has been the basis for a considerable amount of analytic work on accounts (Antaki, 1994), it is not the approach I adopt in this study.

As I have stated, my primary concern in this research is to examine the discursive actions performed by men in talk about food. Certainly, I could undertake such an examination by considering the kinds of repertoires invoked, and their situated functions. However, the focus in examining repertoires is primarily upon the content of discourse, rather upon the discursive practices of participants. Consequently, the actions being accomplished by the invocation of particular repertoires are only considered at the *general* level of the discourse. This may be problematic because, as Wooffitt (1992, p.60) argues:

the activities accomplished in talk are located at a sequential and interactional order of detail for which the notion of linguistic repertoire cannot provide an account.

To fully examine the actions performed by interactants in talk, it is important to consider their sequential organisation. Examining the sequential context within which an utterance is produced is essential if the action it performs is to be explicated. In other words, to get a sense of the function of a particular statement (e.g. metaphor, trope, term) it is necessary to examine the specific interactional, or discursive context, within which it is produced. Moreover, a failure to attend to the organisational and structural properties of discourse may lead to a loss of analytic detail with regards to the interactional activities of respondents (Widdicombe and Wooffitt, 1995). Consequently, the subtle and variable formulations that are produced, and the differential functions performed, may be distorted by their broad categorisation into repertoires.

While a focus upon the repertoires that are drawn upon by participants detracts from a detailed explication of the kinds of actions being performed, it is important to recognise their value in drawing attention to the culturally organised linguistic resources that inform discursive practices.

As I have argued, I regard such resources as relevant to the actions performed by men in talk. These actions are constructive and thus involve the judicious selection of culturally available words, phrases, statements and metaphors. However, rather than conceive of such resources as organised into specific discourses or interpretative repertoires (notions which are both subject to potential reification: Wetherell and Potter, 1992), I prefer to consider these as culturally available but tacit 'reasoning procedures' (Widdicombe, 1993). This notion enables a specific focus upon discursive *practice* (rather than content) while at the same time stressing the shared cultural resources that inform talk.

#### 2.4 Modelling discursive action

A recognition of the culturally organised nature of talk - in terms of its structural properties and the resources that inform the constructions produced - is the basis for an approach to discursive action outlined by Edwards and Potter (1992). These analysts have produced a useful model of

discursive action which attempts to explicate some of the issues relevant to an analysis of participant's discursive practices. This model focuses specifically upon *practice*, in contrast to both post-structuralist and interpretative repertoire based approaches. Essentially, it is a set of guidelines for discursive enquiry that is described as a (*op.cit.*, p.154):

conceptual scheme that captures some of the features of participants' discursive practices that we have found it necessary to distinguish, and illustrates some of the relationships between them.

The model of discursive action draws upon conversation analytic research to consider the actions performed by interactants in talk. However, it goes further that a focus upon the structural properties of language by additionally stressing the importance of the cultural context. In other words, these authors encourage analysts to employ their own cultural understandings to examine the kinds of issues (or as I have argued, 'reasoning procedures') that are relevant to the discursive practices of participants. According to this model, such practices can be considered to have three key features.

The first feature they identify is that of the action orientation of language and accounts. The actions performed in talk thus constitute a primary focus for analysis. However, they also argue that all discursive actions occur only as part of activity sequences. In other words, singular discursive acts are occasioned and situated phenomena which gain their sense through their location within a sequence of talk. Consequently, to examine the action being performed by a particular construction, it must be considered in relation to its location within a discursive context (i.e. an activity sequence).

The second section of the model refers to the dilemma of stake or interest that interactants are caught in when producing reports of events or activities. As Edwards and Potter (1992, p.158) suggest:

People treat each other, and often treat groups, as entities with desires, motivations, institutional allegiances and biases, and they display these concerns in their reports and attributional inferences...Because discourse displays these concerns, we suggest that participants should be thought of as caught in a dilemma of stake or interest: how to produce accounts which attend to interests without being undermined as interested.

To deal with the issue of interest, respondents may employ a number of discursive techniques to confer factual status upon a claim. These techniques work to formulate an account as disinterested and thus manage the dilemma of stake. By examining the nature and deployment of techniques such as listing (e.g. Smith, 1978), the construction of factual reports can be examined. Additionally, a second discursive practice of relevance to the management of interest is rhetoric. Rhetorical strategies are employed within reports to undermine alternative constructions of a particular state of affairs. Essentially, it is thus possible to argue that discourse is organised rhetorically. This constitutes a further topic of study when examining reports.

The final section of the discursive action model addresses the notion of accountability. When describing an event or activity speakers routinely construct a version that assigns responsibility for the actualities that arise. In other words, they deal with issues of agency and responsibility in relation to the state of affairs they are describing. Moreover, as the events or activities described by speakers often involve them, their own accountability is frequently at stake in the reports they produce. It is not, however, simply their accountability within *events* that is of relevance to interactants, but also the actions performed in *talk*. Particular reports may themselves be accountable matters. For example, as Edwards and Potter suggest (1992, p.166):

a report that performs part of a blaming will have precisely the potential requirements of accountability of that act. The act of blaming could itself be inspected for its partial or motivated nature, for instance, or for its adequacy *vis-à-vis* some version of 'the facts'.

By recognising that speakers attend to notions of their accountability within events, analysts are able to examine how responsibility and agency is constructed, the kinds of accountable concerns

that are displayed in relation to different activities and the ways in which accountability may be defended in specific interactional contexts.

The three different sections of the model of discursive action essentially provide a framework for examining participant's discursive practices. Each of these three aspects may be taken as a particular or central focus for research. However, together they constitute some of the key issues relevant to an analysis of participant's actions in talk. While Edwards and Potter (1992) in their analysis focus particularly upon the rhetorical strategies by interactants, their work is useful in blending a focus upon discursive action with a sensitivity to the context within which they take place. Attention to context informs participants practices in terms of the actions they undertake, the interestedness they display and the accountability they construct.

While my focus in this research is less upon rhetoric and more upon action, the model of discursive action provides a suitable framework to enable me to fulfil my intention to examine men's talk about food. It offers the most thorough account of participants' discursive practices while at the same time retaining a sense of the culturally informed and constructive nature of language. This focus enables an explication of the actions performed by participants and a consideration of the culturally available reasoning procedures informing talk (such as those regarding interest and accountability). Essentially, as Antaki (1994, p.41) argues, it:

offers a view of human life which insists on 'action', or rather 'action through the medium of talk'...Moreover they [the authors] propose that parties to such talk are alive to the interests they might promote, and that they appreciate that it makes them accountable.

In aligning the analytic approach adopted in this research with the model of discursive action proposed by Edwards and Potter (1992), I am situating my work within a broader theoretical context encompassing many different orientations to the analysis of discourse. As I have argued, my aim in this research is to focus upon the discursive actions performed by speakers. The

reason for this is that language is both functional and constructive. Attempting to examine the reality of men's dietary beliefs and practices is thus impracticable and untenable - based as it is upon a number of problematic assumptions regarding the nature of the 'individual' and the social context.

Rather than resolve these difficulties by manufacturing an account of reality (as I attempted in my initial pilot study), my focus has turned to the ways in which participants themselves construct food in talk. This focus, strongly influenced by observations regarding the functional and constructive nature of language, required an analytic approach that considered specifically upon how language is used in relation to food. As I have considered, there are many approaches to the analysis of discourse that focus upon, for example, the technical aspects of language itself (conversation analysis) or its content (e.g. post-structuralist, interpretative repertoires). However, while both these foci are extremely important, it is my contention that neither are suitable for an examination of men's talk about food in this instance. As I have argued, a more appropriate analytic orientation are the practices of men in talk about food. Essentially, as I have suggested, the concern is to examine discursive 'topics' which are (Edwards and Potter, 1992, p.2):

things people topicalise or orientate to, or imply, in their discourse..such discursive constructions...are examined in the context of their occurrence as situated and occasioned constructions whose precise nature makes sense, to participants and analysts alike, in terms of the social actions those descriptions accomplish.

The focus is thus upon the discursive practices of the participants from a culturally informed orientation. It is important to point out, however, that an examination of these are not regarded as a basis for considering the underlying *intentions* of speakers. Rather the desire is to examine the dynamic and pragmatic aspects of language used (Widdicombe, 1993). I will briefly consider some of the practical steps I undertook in examining discursive actions after first describing how I went about collecting accounts pertaining to food from men.

## 2.5 The research process

Due to the labour intensive nature of collecting and analysing accounts, I decided that a small number of men should be involved in the research. The diversity of issues relating to food is considerable. It was thus impossible to cover all relevant topics in one interview. Consequently, I decided that a number of interviews with the same participants was the most appropriate design for the study. This would allow me to adopt a detailed focus on the different aspects of food.

The research design I selected was a series of four interviews with eight men. This number of interviews allowed me to thoroughly examine talk in relation to the four areas of interest I had identified (preferences, problematic issues, household context, and eating out) and generate a considerable quantity of raw data. Interviewing eight men allowed me the flexibility to undertake the research and analyse the data in the time available.

### 2.5.1 The participants

I decided to recruit men from as wide a variety of backgrounds and age-groups as possible, although I was not attempting to formulate a representative sample. The majority of the respondents were contacted through their workplace, although three became involved through personal contacts. The participants were:

1/ Male, mid-forties. Current occupation - goods received manager at supermarket. The respondent had worked in this job for two years, having previously been employed as a security guard and before that a member of the police force. Married with two sons, aged between 10 and 14.

2/ Male, early-twenties. Currently unemployed but previously engaged as a storeman within a furniture depository. Single, living in a bedsit.

3/ Male, late thirties. A teacher in a local secondary school since he left university. Married with two sons, aged under 10.

4/ Male, early seventies. Currently retired but previously employed as an executive director of a brewery. This respondent had a number of occupations throughout his lifetime including professional footballer and welder. Married with two adult children.

5/ Male, early-thirties. Presently editor of an in-house magazine, although previously worked as a publishing assistant. Divorced, lived alone.

6/ Male, mid-twenties. Police constable for two years. Previous occupation as a shop manager. Married with one child recently born.

7/ Male, mid-forties. Mechanic in a factory. Previously owned garage overseas. Married with two adult children.

8/ Male, early sixties. Present employment as a minister of religion, although previous occupations included factory worker and tailor. Married with one adult child.

### 2.5.2 Up hill and down dale: the procedure

After they had all agreed to take part, I telephoned the participants to arrange a preliminary meeting with each of them. The purpose of this meeting was to explain fully the nature of the research and answer any questions that they may have had. I also intended that an initial meeting such as this would make the interview process easier as a result of the participants getting used to talking to me. During the preliminary meeting, participants were asked to sign an informed



consent form, which stated their right to withdraw from the study at any time. In every preliminary meeting, the date and time for the first interview was agreed. Seven out of the eight preliminary interviews were held in the participant's home in the evening. One meeting was held in an interview room at the respondent's workplace at mid-morning.

All participants were interviewed in the same location as the preliminary interview four times over the period of ten months. This was a slightly longer period I had planned due to the difficulties of arranging interviews over the summer. I had agreed with all participants at the outset that interviews would be conducted every six to eight weeks. I felt this amount of time between interviews would spread the commitment involved. It would also allow plenty of time to arrange the next meeting and to enable data transcription to take place.

To maintain clarity and focus, each of the four interviews addressed different aspects of food. Within each interview, I asked a number of questions that regarded, in some way or another, a specific theme. In order to maintain some degree of consistency across interviews with all the participants, I devised interview schedules which contained a number of specifically phrased questions to introduce issues to participants<sup>2</sup>. These were generally followed up with other questions, or re-phrased according to the demands of the situation. Each of the interviews lasted between 45 minutes and 2 hours, with the majority lasting roughly an hour.

In the first interview I was primarily interested in preferences for specific foods, and how these were described and accounted for. I asked questions about specific foodstuffs (e.g. meats). Questions ranged from those stating simply 'do you like' and 'do you eat' to those exploring notions of desire for particular foods (e.g. favourite and least favourite foods. I also asked questions regarding the reasoning behind specific likes and dislikes to examine the kinds of justifications produced.

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<sup>2</sup> For interview schedules see Appendix iii

In the second interview, I explored talk about food consumption outside the household. The two primary areas of focus here were food at work and eating out. In relation to work, specific issues discussed included the impact of workplace facilities on consumption, the time available for consumption, the kinds of foods preferred at work, cost and the influence of work pattern (e.g. shift). Those participants who were not currently in employment were asked about previous experiences. In relation to eating out, respondents were asked about when and where they ate out, the cost of doing so, the kinds of foods they would eat etc. I also examined talk how particular eating experiences (such as fast food restaurants) were constructed and assessed.

In interview three, the topic under consideration was food in the household context. A number of issues were examined. I asked questions regarding the distribution of food related tasks (e.g. shopping and cooking), when food was consumed and meal patterns of the household. I also considered wider issues relating to the significance of the household context, such as its impact upon eating preferences and practices.

In the final interview I explored about issues that are often regarded as problematic, such as body-weight and dieting. To do this, I decided to provide images of food as a basis for initial discussion. In this way I felt intimate issues (e.g. a perceived need to lose weight) could be raised informally. The discussion could then progress to the respondents own experiences.

In this interview I showed the respondents eight advertisements for food products. These images related to one the following: issues of weight/dieting, notions of guilt and concerns about health and fitness. For example, I showed the respondents an advert for chocolate that made relevant the notion of guilt. After discussing the nature of the advert, I asked participants about their consumption of chocolate and sweet snacks before moving on to address their experience of guilt more generally. Similarly, I showed the respondents an advert for a low fat product designed to assist in weight loss (weight watchers frozen food). I asked questions asking whether or not the respondent would buy such a product before moving on to ask about issues concerning weight.

#### 2.5.4 Transcription and analysis

Interviews were transcribed using a version of the notation employed by Potter and Wetherell (1987)<sup>3</sup>. Preliminary analysis took the form of a general read through of all transcripts. Common features and regularities in the discourse were noted, in addition to some of variations that seemed interesting. This form of analysis allowed me to build up a map of the talk - in terms of topics covered, kinds of responses produced etc. While each of the four interviews with the participants related to a particular topic, there were a number of overlaps where the same aspect was discussed more than once. For example, preferences for particular foods were considered explicitly during interview one, but also discussed during the other interviews in relation to, for instance, meals chosen when eating out.

After getting a feel for the material in this way I began to focus more specifically upon the discursive actions being performed and began working with particular themes that had emerged from my preliminary analysis. These themes were essentially regularities in the constructions produced by respondents and spanned issues considered in all four interviews. For example, in relation to sweets, a number of respondents provided a similar kind of description that made reference to their limited consumption. After identifying regularities such as this I began to explore the kinds of *discursive actions* that were being performed. In other words, I began to focus more specifically upon the level of the discourse. However, to recognise the *variable* nature of reports, I also extracted from my transcripts all other explicit references to each topic that I was considering. Consequently, I was able to examine regularities and differences in the discursive practices undertaken by respondents.

Analysing discourse is a complex process that is very difficult to describe. There is no specific or mechanical procedure for doing so (Potter and Wetherell, 1987). What is required is an analytic

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<sup>3</sup> See appendix IV for notation details

mentality (Schenkein, 1978) whereby a certain sensitivity to the functional and constructive nature of language is adopted. Developing this mentality took time, as many of the skills involved are intuitive and thus in stark contrast to my previous experience in quantitative and qualitative research. However, gradually over time I became familiar with the methods I was employing. Certainly, I found Drew (1987) helpful in way he proposes examining a discursive act as if it is a solution to a problem. From an analytic stance, the task is to identify the nature of the problem and the way in which the constructions produced work to resolve it.

After producing a number of draft analyses, I began to consider which issues to focus upon in this thesis. It was important to retain analysis pertaining to each of the four issues (preferences, problematic issues, household context and food out of the home) I had identified at the outset. However, I was also keen to work with talk about those issues that had been stressed by previous research as of significance in relation to gender. Consequently, I decided to focus upon the nine topics which are presented in the following four chapters. In the first analytic chapter, I examine how men talk about specific preferences.

### **CHAPTER THREE**

### 3.0 Preferences

It is often argued that meat plays a central role within western culture and is normally favoured over foods such as bread or vegetables (Fiddes, 1991). In the UK, consumer surveys have suggested that over 95% of the population consume meat on a regular basis (MORI, 1989). Certainly, there is little evidence to suggest it was consumed in anything like the quantities that it is today by pre-historic and medieval communities (Fiddes, 1991).

In this analysis I consider how men talk about meat. Before examining the empirical data, I will briefly explicate some key understandings with regards to meat that have been produced by existing knowledges of food. These understandings relate to the significance of meat as a feature of diet, the close relationship between meat and masculinity and finally, the impact on meat consumption of wider cultural trends.

#### 3.1 The significance of meat

The significance of meat as a feature of diet has been highlighted by many empirical studies. Kerr and Charles (1986), for example, on the basis of their research with 200 working class women, suggest that meat is regarded as an essential and central element of the main meal of the day. One reason for this commonly cited by their respondents was the nutritional importance of meat as a foodstuff. This explanation resonates with common-sense notions pertaining to meat and also the arguments produced by those promoting meat for economic reasons. For example, a recent promotional publication distributed by the Meat and Livestock Commission<sup>1</sup> proclaims (British Meat, 1995, p.3):

the red meats (beef, lamb and pork) have a high nutrient density. In other words they contain a wide variety of nutrients in useful amounts. Meat is also a major source of protein. It is also an important source of B vitamins, including B12, which is not naturally found in foods of plant origin.

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<sup>1</sup> the organisation representing the meat trades

Assertions such as this formulate meat as of considerable nutritional significance. However, it has been proposed that meat additionally plays an important symbolic function within Western culture. Social anthropologists such as Fiddes (1991) have argued that the consumption of meat is one way in which the relationship between the natural and cultural worlds is symbolically mediated. As he suggests (*op.cit.*, p.226):

meat's pre-eminence in our food system derives primarily from its tangibly representing to us the principle of human power over nature. In this case the hidden message is that we only became civilised when we began to exercise our ability to dominate other creatures by killing and eating them.

In this respect, the consumption of meat can be regarded as an expression of power over nature. By killing animals for food, a culture symbolically represents its dominance over the natural environment. Moreover, meat comes to represent aspects of the natural world such as strength, aggression and sexuality (Twigg, 1983).

Not all meats are associated with such animalistic notions. Drawing on the social anthropological and semiotic analysis of food characterised by the work of Levi-Strauss (1965), Douglas (1975) and Barthes (1973), researchers such as Twigg (1983) and Charles and Kerr (1988) have argued that specific meats are accorded different symbolic roles within Western culture. It is red meats which are most commonly associated with 'animalistic' notions due to their bloody composition. White meats, such as chicken, are normally regarded as lighter and more delicate. Moreover, such meats are generally considered as of lesser social status than red meats. To develop this point, Twigg (1983) has argued that all animal based foods are culturally organised into a status hierarchy. At the top of the hierarchy is red meat. Lower down the scale come white meats such as chicken and fish and then, at the bottom, are other foods derived from animal sources such as dairy products. The way in which the meat is cooked is also of importance in

relation to status. Roasted meats are accorded the highest status as a direct result of the level of blood retained within them while cooking. (Twigg, 1983)

### 3.2 Men and meat

The high status of red meats and bloody forms of cooking is a consequence of these forms representing most closely the natural origins of the meat itself. The presence of blood, in particular, highlights the meat's animalistic basis and thus accentuates the power held by culture over nature. As meat is linked to power, it has been proposed that its consumption is often associated with men (Thorogood and Coulter, 1992). Certainly, theorists have argued that common forms of Western masculinity often revolve around the symbolic dominance of nature (Seidler, 1994). By consuming meat, men represent their dominance over nature. Additionally, however, they subsume the animalistic qualities of the meat (red meat in particular) which thus become integral features of men. Notions such as strength and aggression are thus commonly constructed as a significant feature of many Western masculinities.

To live up to masculine ideals and become big and strong (Thorogood and Coulter, 1992), men are thought to require meat, and red meat in particular (Twigg, 1983). Moreover, the connections between such bloody meats and notions of masculinity are constantly reinforced by linguistic associations such as 'beefcake' - a term often applied to muscular men. Such associations do not arise in connection with white meats such as chicken or fish. Indeed, white meats are often associated with notions of femininity (Lupton, 1996). Additionally, as lighter foods they are served to those that are unwell (often steamed, grilled or boiled) and those who do not require the stimulation of red-blooded qualities (Twigg, 1983).

While this may be the case, it is claimed that men eat more of all forms of meat than women - who make up a greater proportion of the vegetarian population (Beardsworth and Keil, 1992b). Within meat-eating households, men consume larger portions of both red and white meats and



have privileged access to meat in times of hardship (Charles and Kerr, 1988). The consumption of meat can thus be seen to represent men's greater level of status within the household. Moreover, the higher value accorded to red meat and its particular association with masculinity is also indicative of men's dominance upon a cultural level (Charles and Kerr, 1988). As a result of these links to power, feminist theorists have argued that the consumption of meat is a feature of patriarchy.

Adams (1990), for example, asserts that the consumption of meat symbolically represents both men's control over nature and men's control over women. She suggests that both women and animals become absent referents as a result of patriarchal culture. Animals are rendered being-less by the processes of meat production and re-naming (such as pigs becoming pork, or a lamb's leg becoming 'leg of lamb'). Women, at the same time, become absent referents due to their objectification within patriarchal culture. As she states (*op.cit.*, p.47):

I propose a cycle of objectification, fragmentation and consumption, which links butchering and sexual violence in our culture. Objectification permits an oppressor to view another being as an object. The oppressor then violates this being by object-like treatment e.g. the rape of women that denies women freedom to say no, or the butchering of animals that converts animals from living breathing beings into dead objects. This process allows fragmentation, or brutal dismemberment and finally consumption....Through fragmentation the object is severed from its ontological meaning. Finally, consumed, it exists only through what it represents.

On the basis of these claims Adams (1990) proposes that the goals of feminism and animal rights are intertwined. Strict vegetarianism, she argues, is the only way of avoiding collusion in oppressive patriarchal practice and asserting female autonomy. This form of ethical vegetarianism is not, however, characterised as the basis of meat-avoidance by many non-meat eaters. On the basis of a survey of 76 non-meat eaters, Beardsworth and Keil (1991) found that 43 stated a moral basis for not eating meat which was generally linked to the treatment of animals. The feminist reasoning for avoiding meat proposed by Adams (1990) was not relevant in any of the responses elicited.

As I have discussed, many of the understandings produced concerning meat highlight its links to men. These generally suggest that meat, and red meat in particular, is symbolically and physically important for men, to enable them to become healthy and strong (Thorogood and Coulter, 1992). Meat's essential qualities in this respect have been accentuated in many ways. For instance a long-standing promotional campaign by the meat industry encouraged men to 'eat meat to live'. This campaign involved images of muscular and fit men undertaking physically demanding activities such as hill running or skiing being juxtaposed with the statement 'eat meat to live'. The clear message of advertisements such as this is that meat is a requirement if the masculine ideal of health and strength is to be attained.

### 3.3 Challenging knowledges

While knowledges of food have generally constructed meat as important to men in particular, more recent understandings are challenging the basis of such assertions. Consumerist surveys have suggested that while the vast majority of the population still define themselves as meat-eaters, 26% claim to be currently reducing the amount of meat they consume (Richardson *et al.*, 1994). In 1995 the average person consumed only 247 grams of carcass meat per week compared with 375 grams ten years previously (Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Fisheries, 1996). In addition, the growth of vegetarianism and veganism is represented by an increase of 76% since 1984 (Beardsworth and Keil, 1991) to around 3-4% of the population (MORI, 1989). While there are more women becoming vegetarian than men, the difference is not overly significant (Beardsworth and Keil, 1991). Moreover, it has also been asserted that men's consumption of meat is reducing considerably (Richardson *et al.*, 1994). There are a number of reasons which have been proposed to account for the general decline in meat consumption by both men and women. One of these is health.

Health, it is argued, is a specific concern to many as a consequence of the links between various conditions and the consumption of meat (Beardsworth and Keil, 1992b). Illnesses such as

coronary heart disease, hypertension and gallstones have all been linked to the consumption of meat, and particularly fatty meat (Cox, 1986). In addition, it has been proposed that the majority of incidences of food poisoning can be attributed in one way or another to meat or animal products (Ehrlichman, 1990). Links such as these between meat and health have been promoted widely. For example, one of the proposals made by the Scottish Office (1993) was a reduction in the consumption, by the Scottish population, of meat products (such as pies), bacon and ham in order to reduce fat intake. These proposals formed the basis of healthy eating campaigns undertaken upon a national level by the Health Education Board for Scotland.

A quite different understanding which may be of relevance to assumptions regarding a close relationship between men and meat relates to the notion of masculinity itself. It has been suggested that within Western culture there is an increasing awareness of problematic aspects of masculinities (Connell, 1995). Ideas associated with animalistic power, as a consequence of the growth of vegetarianism, may have become ambivalent. As Twigg (1983, p.27) argues:

Vegetarianism has also been involved in more subtle redefinitions, for the meaning of meat is unfocused.....meat can here stand not for maleness in an approved sense, but for what is seen as a false, macho stereotype of masculinity. Thus "strength" and "power" becomes "cruelty" and "aggression": masculine vigour and destructiveness.

From this perspective, notions of masculinity which have been assumed as positive and desirable (e.g. to be strong and aggressive) may contrastingly be regarded in a more negative manner. Moreover, it has also been argued that the range of masculinities culturally available to men has increased (Connell, 1995). Forms of masculinity that specifically relate to 'animalistic' notions such as strength and aggression are thus subsumed within a number of competing and contradictory masculinities reflected widely in images and narratives of men.

### 3.4 Men's talk about meat

As I have considered, meat has been constructed in a number of different ways by knowledges of food. These have stressed the links between meat and masculinity, although other issues have also been characterised as of relevance. In the following analysis I consider how men themselves talk about meat - an important undertaking bearing in mind the close linkage between that proposed by many knowledges of food.

In this analysis I explore perhaps the most common assumption about men and meat: that meat is regarded as an *essential* aspect of diet. The accounts I consider were produced during interview four. In this interview I was interested in considering the consumption of meat primarily in relation to notions of health, although an additional concern was to consider some common-sense assumptions that are constructed as relevant by existing understandings.

In the interview I presented the respondents with an image drawn from the 'eat meat to live' advertising campaign produced by the Meat and Livestock commission in 1993. It was an advertisement for meat and involved a fit and healthy man skiing on a steep mountain accompanied by the statement "Eat Meat to Live". As I have suggested, such imagery makes reference to notions that meat is essential for men to be healthy and strong - and thus live up to masculine ideals. Consequently, a specific set of issues regarding the significance of meat for men are made contextually relevant.

In the analysis that follows, I explore talk about this notion by looking at responses to two questions. The first of these, 'do you eat meat to live' makes direct reference to the ideas raised in advert. The second question, 'does meat make you stronger and healthier than other kinds of food', extends this line of enquiry by examining the degree to which meat is significant for health and strength. I have organised the analysis in terms of responses to the first, and then the second question.

In the first six extracts of the analysis I will consider some of the different ways in which the idea that meat is eaten 'to live' is rejected. In extracts 1 to 4, the speakers<sup>2</sup> deny that they eat meat for this reason and provide an alternative basis for its consumption.

In extracts 1 and 2, both speakers explicitly refute the proposition that they eat meat to live by producing a negative response to the question (extract 1: line 3, extract 2: line 2). In both extracts enjoyment is described as an alternative basis for its consumption.

#### Extract 1 - R3IV, pp.07

|    |    |  |
|----|----|--|
| 1  | I: | do you eat meat to live  |
| 2  | R: | (2)  |
| 3  |    | naa not really (.) not to live (.2) errr::rrr I eat it probably just cos |
| 4  |    | (.4) I enjoy it  |
| 5  | I: | (.6) uh hu   |
| 6  | R: | (.4) I wouldn't say like to live   |
| 7  | I: | (.2) uh hu   |
| 8  | R: | (3)  |
| 9  |    | ermm:::mmm (.6) I mean er (.) most meats I like (.2) and I think I       |
| 10 |    | just eat them because they're (.2) you know (.4) nice taste and er       |
| 11 |    | (.2) I enjoy them (.) I enjoy the taste of meat..                        |

#### Extract 2 - R8IV, pp.12

|   |    |  |
|---|----|--|
| 1 | I: | do you eat meat to live  |
| 2 | R: | (.4) naa:a (.6) I'd say (.) basically I think it's just a con I remember |
| 3 |    | these adverts when they first came out just thinking they're a lot of    |
| 4 |    | rubbish you know (.) so::o (.8) just thinking what's the deal (.) what   |
| 5 |    | are they trying to sell here (.4) I mean I don't go skiing like that (.) |
| 6 |    | and (.4) I mean I eat meat sometimes cos I enjoy it (.) like I say I eat |
| 7 |    | meat about once a week..   |

In extract 2, on lines 6 to 7 the speaker says "I eat meat sometimes cos I enjoy it". Similarly, in extract 1, the speaker says on lines 3 to 4 "errr::rrr I eat it probably just cos (.4) I enjoy it. Note how this respondent describes the basis of his enjoyment as taste: "nice taste and er (.2) I enjoy

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<sup>2</sup> as this is the first analysis it is important to point out that the speakers are identified by numbers (i.e. R7 = respondent 7). The number of the interview (e.g. IV) and the page upon which the extract is situated within the transcript is also identified.

them (.) I enjoy the taste of meat" (lines 10-11). By producing an alternative reason for eating meat in this way, both speakers denial of eating it to live is warranted.

In extract 2, the respondent additionally undermines the validity of eating meat to live as a means of accounting for his denial of doing so. Prior to suggesting that he eats meat because he enjoys it, this speaker makes reference to the advertisement upon which the question was based. On line 2 he describes the idea of eating meat to live as a "con" (line 2) and then characterises his initial reaction to this advert when it first appeared as one of cynicism - "what's the deal (.) what are they trying to sell here" ? (line 4-5). This question invokes the mercantile basis of the claim being made and thus highlights the interests involved in its production. Consequently, its factual status is undermined. By undermining its factual status in this way, the speaker justifies his prior rejection of the advert ("a lot of rubbish": lines 3-4) and thus the idea that meat should be eaten 'to live'.

As I have considered, in extracts 1 and 2 both speakers deny that they eat meat to live and produce an alternative reason for doing so. In extract three, the premise that meat is eaten 'to live' is similarly rejected and an alternative basis for the consumption of meat produced. In common with extracts 1 and 2, this basis is formulated as enjoyment. Yet in contrast to these previous extracts, the following account contains an initial acknowledgement that meat is eaten to live.

#### Extract 3 - R5IV, pp.07

- |   |    |  |
|---|----|--|
| 1 | I: | do you eat meat to live  |
| 2 | R: | (.6) yes   |
| 3 | I: | (1) yes  |
| 4 | R: | (.2) yeah I couldn't do without meat or at least I wouldn't enjoy my |
| 5 |    | food nearly as much if I didn't eat meat..                           |

On line 2 the speaker replies to the question by saying “yes”. Following a repetition of this response by the interviewer (which is interpreted as a request for further information: line 3), the speaker states “yeah I couldn’t do without meat” (line 4). This utterance explicitly formulates meat as a requirement. It is, however, modified on lines 4 to 5 by the subsequent statement “or at least I wouldn’t enjoy my food as much if I didn’t eat meat”. This latter claim serves to characterise enjoyment as the basis for the speaker’s consumption of meat. Consequently, it undermines any inferences arising from his prior assertion that meat is regarded as a physical necessity. In modifying his claim in this way, the speaker undertakes a modal shift (from *couldn’t* to *wouldn’t* ) which enables him to work up a reasonable proposition which meshes more readily with the notion of enjoyment. Moreover, this modification tacitly characterises his preceding claim of a need for meat as a means of accentuating the degree of pleasure derived from it.

In the three extracts I have considered so far it is enjoyment that has been characterised by the speakers as the primary reason for eating meat. In relation to the question, the effect of this is to undermine the proposition that meat is eaten to live. In the next extract a similar descriptive strategy (i.e. providing an alternative basis for consumption) can be observed. In extract 4, however, the speaker provides an account of meat-eating premised upon pragmatic concerns.

#### Extract 4 - R1IV, pp.09

- |   |    |   |
|---|----|---|
| 1 | I: | do you eat meat to live   |
| 2 | R: | (.) no (1) I don't think I do (.4) I think I eat meat (.) I eat meat    |
| 3 |    | because er:::rrr (.) the boys eat it and I eat meat because Ann::ne (.) |
| 4 |    | if Anne's in first she makes the food and err:::r (.4) she tends to     |
| 5 |    | make mince and chicken and that but no (.) I wouldn't say I ate (.)     |
| 6 |    | eat it to live I eat probably because it happens to be there (.) if it  |
| 7 |    | was up to me I probably wouldn't eat it..                               |

On lines 3 to 5 the speaker suggests that his consumption of meat is due to situational factors such as his sons eating it (line 3: I take the term ‘boys’ here to refer to his children) and his partner preparing it (“she tends to make mince and chicken”: lines 4-5). By attributing his meat

eating to external features in this way, the speaker infers that his consumption of meat is primarily a result of practicality. This inference is given added impetus on lines 6-7 where his pragmatic reasoning is further described by both the phrases “I eat it probably because it happens to be there” and “if it was up to me I probably wouldn’t eat it”. The latter utterance implicitly characterises his current situation as one that affords him little autonomy in deciding what he eats (i.e. what he eats is not up to him). This characterises his consumption of meat as entirely circumstantial and thus warrants his assertion of pragmatism.

In this extract, again, the production of an alternative basis for eating meat has worked to reject the proposition that it is eaten to live. In extract 5, a somewhat different constructive approach can be observed. In this extract the speaker produces a positive reply to the question yet goes on to formulate the basis of his proposition in a manner designed to reject the idea that meat is a specific physical necessity. Two assertions are sequentially produced to work up this claim.

#### Extract 5 - R4IV, pp.06

- |   |    |   |
|---|----|---|
| 1 | I: | Do you eat meat to live   |
| 2 | R: | (.6) yeah (.) I eat meat to live (.) but I eat vegetables to live and I |
| 3 |    | drink water to live as well don't I (.4) and I go to work to live so I  |
| 4 |    | can earn the money to go and get my meat and vegetables ha ha           |
| 5 |    | (.2) it's all part of the things we have to do and meat is ermm one     |
| 6 |    | way of replenishing your energy just as (1) er::r fish or eating a loaf |
| 7 |    | of bread.   |

The first of these assertions, on lines 2 to 4, is a three-part listing (Jefferson, 1990) of activities other than eating meat that are also undertaken to live. The production of this list characterises the speaker’s prior response to the question as an acknowledgement of meat’s general life sustaining properties. His subsequent statement “it’s all part of the things we have to do” (lines 4-5) articulates this characterisation explicitly and thus formulates the consumption of meat as simply part of the general process of maintaining life, along with many other activities. Any



suppositions that eating meat is of greater significance than similar life sustaining endeavours are implicitly rejected. The importance of meat is thus tacitly downplayed.

The second assertion made by the speaker is provided in relation to the first. On lines 5 to 6 the following utterance is produced: “and meat is ermm one way of replenishing your energy just as (.) er:r fish or eating a loaf of bread”. This statement modifies the speaker’s previous suggestion that meat is a requirement for living to the lesser claim that it is simply one way of sustaining life (by replenishing energy). This modification serves to undermine the idea that meat is specifically needed to live. The presumption that meat may be consumed on this basis is thus characterised as not relevant.

In extract 6 the speaker similarly rebuts the proposal that meat is eaten ‘to live’. As well as explicitly rejecting the notion of eating meat to live (by responding negatively to the question: line 2), this speaker describes his indifference to eating only a small amount of meat as a means of warranting this denial.

#### Extract 6 - R6IV, pp.08-9

- |    |    |   |
|----|----|---|
| 1  | I: | do you eat meat to live   |
| 2  | R: | (.8) n::o ha ha ha I'm awkward aren't I                                 |
| 3  | I: | (.4 ) you said it   |
| 4  | R: | (2)   |
| 5  |    | I mean I eat meat (.) but I don't eat meat to live (.) I wouldn't say   |
| 6  |    | (.6) Sue (.) it's not that she doesn't eat meat she says she can't chew |
| 7  |    | it (.) it makes her (.) she feels sick (.2) you know she's got to chew  |
| 8  |    | an::d er:r (.4) and so we tend (.4) she was just saying the other day   |
| 9  |    | there we tend to be more (.2) on the vegetarian (.4) style (.) you      |
| 10 |    | know I mean ok she eats chicken and (.) ham and mince (.) things        |
| 11 |    | like that but we tend quite a lot to just eat vegetables and I::I don't |
| 12 |    | mind (.) you ] know   |
| 13 | I: | [uhhu   |
| 14 | R: | (.6) but it doesn't bother me (.2) err::r (.6) having said that (.) I   |
| 15 |    | mean I had frying steak last night ha ]                                 |
| 16 | I: | [ ha ha ha  |
| 17 | R: | ha ha (.4) but I don't I don't eat it to live if you know what I mean   |
| 18 |    | it's not (.2) I mean I don't see that as being an essential.            |

On lines 8 to 12 the speaker characterises the diet he consumes with his wife as predominantly vegetarian. He states, for example, “we tend quite a lot just to eat vegetables” (line 11). This state of affairs is subsequently formulated as unproblematic through the phrases “I::I don’t mind” and “it doesn’t bother me” (lines 11-14). By constructing his reaction to eating this diet as one of indifference, the speaker implies that meat is not considered as of particular importance, and thus not regarded as a requirement. This supposition adds weight to (and consequently warrants) his initial proposition that he does not eat meat ‘to live’, a claim re-stated on lines 18 (“I don’t see that as being an essential”).

A second interesting feature of this account is the manner in which this respondent seems sensitive to inferences that he does not eat meat. On two occasions he produces a statement stressing that meat is consumed. On line 5, after his prior rejection of the question, he says “I mean I eat meat”. Similarly, on lines 14 to 15 following the claim that he is indifferent about not eating meat regularly, he suggests “having said that (.) I mean I had frying steak last night”.

In the six extracts I have explored so far, the speakers have rejected the proposition that meat is consumed on the basis of need (‘to live’). In the following two extracts, a different claim is produced: namely that meat is necessary for better health. In both extracts, this claim has a tentative and defensive quality. These extracts are continuations of two considered previously (extracts 2 and 3 respectively).

Extract 7 - R5IV, pp.07-08 (continuation of extract 2)

|    |    |  |
|----|----|--|
| 8  | R: | ..(2) I mean I (.4) I::I think (.) probably you are slightly healthier |
| 9  |    | fo::r (.2) it's maybe just a (.4) you maybe need some meat (.) I       |
| 10 |    | wouldn't go as far as this advert though (.2) you become some          |
| 11 |    | amazing downhill skier because you (.) eat meat (.2) it's a bit er]    |
| 12 | I: | [ha  |
| 13 |    | ha   |
| 14 | R: | (.4) a bit much (.4) but for me personally I must admit I like meat    |
| 15 |    | (.6) ermm (.6) I wouldn't like to have a diet without.                 |

Extract 8 - R8IV, pp.12 (continuation of extract 3)

6           R:       .. (.4) but I really if (.) I think I ea- (.) I eat meat because we::ll I was  
7                   fully vegetarian for a while and I don't think it made me all that  
8                   well (.) ermm::mm so I eat meat to get certain things that its hard to  
9                   get from vegetables (.) and (.) I like the taste of some meat (.6) but  
10                  I don't really regard it as adding a huge amount to my life.

In extract 8, an anecdotal narrative is provided that results in the supposition that meat is required. On lines 6 to 7 the respondent claims “I was fully vegetarian for a while and I ::I don’t think it made me all that well”. Note here the vague way in which ill health is formulated in this statement (“all that well”). This serves to prevent what could be construed as a tenuous causal linkage between vegetarianism and ill health being undermined, as no specific symptoms or illnesses are mentioned. This statement also acts to implicitly characterise the effect on health of not eating meat as of less significance than may be implied through explicit reference to illness. The proposition being made, that meat is needed for health, is thus given a tentative gloss that acts to downplay its significance.

In extract 7 the speaker produces the claim that meat is necessary in an equally defensive manner by stating “probably you are slightly healthier fo::r (.2) it’s maybe just a (.4) you maybe need some meat” (lines 8-9) Note the careful formulation of the phrase “slightly healthier” (line 8) and the manner in which the subsequent assertion is characterised as a need for only “some” meat (line 9). This respondent additionally makes reference to the ‘eat meat to live’ imagery by producing an exaggerated description of the claim it is making (e.g. “you become some amazing downhill skier because you (.) eat meat”: lines 10-13). In producing this description, he develops an explicit contrast between the advert and his prior proposition of a need for “some” meat that acts to further illustrate the minimal nature of the claim he is making. Consequently, the significance of a need for meat is downplayed. A similar action is undertaken in extract 8 through the statement “I don’t really regard it as adding a huge amount to my life” (lines 9-10).

As I have observed, the previous two speakers have proposed that some meat is required for health. This claim is produced in a tentative and defensive manner. I will further consider this potential basis of a need for meat in the next four extracts, where responses to the question “does meat make you stronger and healthier than other kinds of food” will be examined. In the first of these extracts, extract 9, the speaker produces a description of his personal experiences to undermine meat’s proposed status as a healthy, strengthening food.

Extract 9 - R1IV, pp.10

|   |    |  |
|---|----|--|
| 1 | I: | does meat make you stronger and healthier than other kinds of food         |
| 2 | R: | (.) no I wouldn't say so (.4) I wouldn't say so (.2) I think err::rr I     |
| 3 |    | feel healthier if I've just eaten vegetarian stuff (.) I feel I've not put |
| 4 |    | the animal fats into me and err::r (.4)my system feels not as (.)          |
| 5 |    | almost not as clogged up (.2) I feel healthier as a result (.6) whether    |
| 6 |    | I am or not I don't know but I certainly feel it and I feel I've got       |
| 7 |    | more energy.   |

On lines 2 to 5 this respondent asserts that he feels healthier after eating vegetarian food. To do so he first establishes a behavioural basis for this feeling (eating vegetarian food and thus consuming no animal fats: lines 3-4), secondly describes a consequential physical reaction (“my system feels not as (.) almost not as clogged up: lines 4-5) and finally provides a more global assessment of this effect (“I feel healthier as a result”: line 5). In making such a claim, the speaker warrants his initial response to the question: a negative assessment of the idea that eating meat leads to greater strength and better health (“no I wouldn’t say so”: line 2). The robustness of this claim is assured, in part, through the personal, anecdotal basis of his reasoning. For example, the respondent employs terms such as “feel” and ‘think’ and acknowledges, on line 5 to 6, the possible discrepancy between how he feels and reality of his health (“whether I am or not I don’t know”). By formulating the basis of his claim in such personal terms, the speaker produces a contentious assertion about meat that is not a factual proposition open to refutation.

In the next two extracts I consider how the speakers acknowledge meat's importance for health in a manner invoking the necessity for a decent or balanced diet. This provides a modified basis for assessing meat's specific value and thus acts to downplay its singular importance.

Extract 10 - R2IV, pp.10

- 1 I: does meat make you stronger and healthier than other kinds of  
2 foods  
3 R: (3)  
4 I don't think so ermm:mm I think (.6) what we eat between Sunday  
5 and Saturday er::r has got to be balanced (.4) has got to be a bit of  
6 all sorts of things with meat (.2) as far as I'm concerned ermm:mm  
7 (.6) playing a very (.) a very important role (.2) not a cardinal one  
8 ermm::mm..

Extract 11 - R5IV, pp.08

- 1 I: does meat make you stronger and healthier than other kinds of  
2 food  
3 R: (3)  
4 i::f (.8) if it's part of a decent diet yeah I would think so (.4) as long  
5 as it's (.4) a nice piece of meat yeah (.2) not a fatty bit (1) fried  
6 meats and stuff like that (.6) a nice piece of meat along with (.4)  
7 you still need vegetables and everything else with it (.4) yeah I think  
8 it is probably healthy.

In extract 10 the speaker makes explicit reference to the importance of a balanced diet by saying “what we eat between Sunday and Saturday has er::r got to be balanced (.4) has got to be a bit of all sorts of things ” (lines 4-5). In extract 11, the respondent similarly proposes a need for balance. This proposition is developed firstly by the statement, in response to the question about meat, “if it's part of a decent diet yeah” (common-sense suggests that a decent diet is a balanced diet: line 4) and subsequently, on lines 6 to 7, the assertion that “you still need vegetables and everything else with it” (meat). By invoking the need for a balanced diet in this way, both speakers implicitly downgrade meat's singular significance for health and strength (the proposal of the question). It is thus a balanced diet *including* meat that is formulated as a requirement, not simply meat itself. Meat is characterised only of significance as an element of a balanced diet. It consequently plays “a very important role (.2) not a cardinal one” ( extract 10, line 7).

A second feature to note in extract 11 is the manner in which the speaker also produces a quality dimension for assessing the value of meat as part of a balanced diet. He proposes that it must be “a nice piece” in contrast to meat that is either fatty or fried (line 5). This proposition serves additionally to minimise the inherent value of meat by characterising its strength and health giving status as contingent upon factors such as composition and preparation.

In the previous two extracts the speakers have downplayed the specific importance of meat.

In the final extract of this analysis, I turn to examine an account which construes meat as of greater nutritional stature than other foods, yet undermines the utility of this attribute. Interestingly, the effect of this proposition is the rejection of any ideas that meat is a physical requirement: a topic not explicitly addressed in the question to which extract refers (line 1-2).

#### Extract 12 R7IV, pp.6

- |    |    |  |
|----|----|--|
| 1  | I: | do you think meat makes you stronger and healthier than other            |
| 2  |    | kinds of food  |
| 3  | R: | (.) because of the high protein content of it (.2) before (.) you didn't |
| 4  |    | know these things when you were young (.4) you were just told (2)        |
| 5  |    | those people who are telling you are telling by their experience or      |
| 6  |    | what they've been told (.2) but now you can (3) educationally be         |
| 7  |    | made aware that the protein contents of meat are high compared to        |
| 8  |    | vegetables and lentils and all that (.4) the grade is much higher (.8)   |
| 9  |    | that's why (1) but over a period I have realised that meat you don't     |
| 10 |    | need that (.4) and not always ee::rrr (.8) some people never eat a       |
| 11 |    | dish without meat their everyday food must be meat (.4) whereas          |
| 12 |    | for me it is not (1) once or twice or thrice (.) depends sometimes it    |
| 13 |    | won't matter (3) because I know the proteins of lentils and things       |
| 14 |    | like that (.) they are good enough.                                      |

Two different claims can be observed in this account. The first of these, on lines 3 to 8 is the assertion that meat does result in greater health and strength than other foods. In response to the question the speaker produces an explanation stating “because of the high protein content of it” (line 3). This assertion implicitly acknowledges the premise of the question and is warranted by reference to two forms of knowledge: lay perceptions (lines 3 -6) and education (lines 6-8).

The second claim produced by the speaker explicitly undermines the importance of meat by formulating it as not a requirement. On lines 9 to 10 the respondent states “over a period I have realised that you don’t need that” and provides an explanation for this proposition in terms of other proteins being good enough (lines 13-14). By characterising this explanation as realised over time through personal experience, the speaker adds weight to its robustness. Note also how he warrants his claim by developing a contrast between his own nonchalant approach to meat, and the practices of others (lines 10-13). This comparison works to *highlight* his indifference toward the consumption of meat (particularly as he uses, in contrast, extreme-case formulations such as “some people never eat a dish without meat”: lines 10-11) and warrant his assertion that meat is not required.

### 3.5 Discussion

In this discussion I want to pick up on some of the interesting features of men’s talk about meat that have emerged from the analysis. The first of these is the denial that meat is eaten to live. In extracts 1 to 6 the speakers all produce this denial. In the first four extracts, an alternative basis for eating meat is provided. This alternative reason works to reject the notion that meat is eaten due to its essential qualities. In extracts 1 to 3 the speakers propose that they eat meat because they enjoy it. In extract 4, a pragmatic explanation is provided for the consumption of meat (“because it happens to be there” etc.). Both these propositions employ common-sense notions (i.e. enjoyment and pragmatism) that may be relevant to the consumption of many foods. Consequently, they contrast with understandings asserting that meat is of *particular significance*. As such, the speakers accentuate their denial of meat’s essential stature. Moreover, it is interesting to note that both enjoyment and pragmatism are not issues stressed by existing knowledges of food with regards to meat-eating. As I have considered, these knowledges have tended to highlight meat’s symbolic (e.g. Fiddes, 1991) and nutritional importance (e.g. Charles and Kerr, 1988).

One possible explanation for the speaker's acting to deny eating meat to live may be that this proposition is difficult to sustain in relation to the increasing cultural awareness of legitimate dietary alternatives (e.g. vegetarianism: Beardsworth and Keil, 1991) Within this analysis, there is certainly evidence to suggest that such knowledge is employed as a resource in the denial that meat is an *essential* element of diet.

In extract 5 the speaker asserts that meat is not essential by proposing that it is simply *one way* of replenishing energy. This assertion works to undermine notions that meat is a specific or essential requirement. Instead, meat is formulated as one means of fulfilling the need for energy providing substances. Moreover, this speaker provides two examples of alternative foods that may equally perform this function - fish or a loaf of bread. Consequently, the legitimacy of other forms of food is accentuated and meat explicitly formulated as non-essential. Similarly, in extract 12, the speaker proposes that meat, while containing a higher grade of protein than other foods, is not required as a result of the proteins in foods such as lentils being "good enough". Again, this assertion draws upon the common-sensical understanding that alternative foodstuffs (such as those commonly found within a vegetarian diet) are sufficient to meet physical needs (i.e. for protein). Finally, in extract 6, the speaker explicitly asserts that he doesn't eat meat to live, subsequently describing his diet as predominantly vegetarian. This state of affairs is formulated by the speaker as unproblematic (e.g. through phrases such as "it doesn't bother me"). Consequently, notions of meat as essential are rejected on the basis of other forms of food being legitimate alternatives.

My argument so far is two-fold. First, I have proposed that the primary action performed by the speakers in extracts 1 to 6 is the rejection of eating meat to live. Second, I have suggested that one reason for this may be that alternative foods are common-sensically constructed as sufficient to meet nutritional needs. Indeed, I have considered how speakers themselves draw upon this common-sense resource in their accounts. In other extracts in the analysis, a sensitivity toward knowledges stressing the legitimacy of alternative foods is also displayed. In extracts 7 and 8, for



example, the speakers produce a claim that meat is *required* for health. However, this claim is made in a tentative and defensive manner that downplays the degree to which meat is necessary. In constructing their claim in this manner, the speakers display a sensitivity to its potentially contentious nature. As I have argued, one reason for such contention may be culturally available knowledges regarding the existence of legitimate alternatives to meat.

While, in these two extracts, the speakers produce their claim of a need for meat in a tentative manner, they do construct meat as *required* for health reasons. This construction draws upon perhaps contrasting common-sense understandings of meat as containing nutritional properties that are important (e.g. Charles and Kerr, 1988) and not found in foods of plant origin (e.g. British Meat, 1995). In extract 12, understandings such as these are also displayed as relevant by the speaker in responding to a question asking if meat resulted in greater strength and better health. In this extract the respondent asserts that meat contains properties such as proteins of a higher grade than other foods. However, in contrast to extracts 6 and 7, he subsequently goes on to propose that these are not essential.

While in extracts 6 and 7 the speakers assert that some meat is required for good health, notions regarding the importance of meat are also displayed as relevant in extracts 10 and 11. In these extracts, both speakers assert that a balanced diet *including meat* is beneficial to health. However, while the speakers in these extracts suggest that meat is important in this respect, the proposition of the question that it is *more* significant for health and strength than other foods is denied. Both respondents accentuate the need for other foods (such as vegetables: extract 11) in addition to meat as part of a balanced diet. This action works to implicitly reject the notion that it is meat *specifically* that results in better health and greater strength. By accentuating the need for a balanced diet in this way, the speakers display a sensitivity to particular inferences regarding the importance of other foods in maintaining strength and health. Such inferences may relate to academic and common-sense understandings of the importance of foods such as vegetables for health (e.g. Scottish Office, 1993). Moreover, in extract 11, the speaker employs

common-sensical understandings pertaining to healthy eating to assert that meat would have to be a “nice piece” that is not “fatty” or “fried”. Knowledge that constructs fatty and fried foods as unhealthy is a regular feature of healthy eating advice promulgated by media and public agencies (Anderson and Hunt, 1992). Consequently, it is a culturally available resource that may be employed in accounts - such as extract 11.

In extract 9, the speaker similarly makes reference to healthy eating knowledges that construct the consumption of fat as unhealthy. In this extract the respondent rejects the proposition that meat results in better health and greater strength by asserting that, because he hasn’t “put all the animal fats” into him, vegetarian food is experienced as healthier. In contrast to extract 11, however, this speaker formulates meat as unhealthy as a consequence of it containing animal fats: a formulation that is commonly constructed as a basis for not eating meat (Beardsworth and Keil, 1991).

As I have considered, the speakers in extracts 9 to 11 deny that meat specifically results in greater strength and better health. It is important for the sake of clarity to stress that the respondent in extract 12, by contrast, does acknowledge the validity of this assertion. However, in this extract he subsequently claims that this state of affairs does not result in meat becoming essential. A final interesting point in relation to this analysis concerns the academic knowledges regarding meat that I discussed earlier. In these knowledges the symbolic and physical significance of meat in relation to notions of masculinity were described. Within these extracts, however, such notions did not constitute resources that were displayed as relevant or employed by respondents. In other words, the significance of masculinity was not a feature of the accounts produced.

### 3.6 Conclusion

In this analysis the respondents generally reject the proposition that meat is essential to live or for good health. In doing so, a number stress the legitimacy of other forms of food. Consequently, I have suggested that the denial that meat is regarded as essential may relate to the difficulty in sustaining such a claim in the face of a common-sense construction of alternative diets as unproblematic. However, the importance of meat for health was also acknowledged by speakers in a manner that seems to display a sensitivity to knowledges of food stressing meat's physiological significance.

While in this analysis I have considered men's talk about meat - a food that is often constructed as masculine - in the next analysis I examine accounts pertaining to salad. This is a food, by contrast, generally associated with women.

### 3.7 Salad

In this second analysis I consider how the participants talk about salad. Salad is a food that is generally constructed as the preference of women, rather than men (Lupton, 1996). Before examining the extracts, I will briefly consider how this construction is resonated within knowledges of food. I will first examine how gender differences in salad consumption have been constructed by consumer surveys and then examine some of the arguments that have been formulated to account for, and explicate, this state of affairs. Finally, I will move on to consider the way in which salad has also been constructed as a healthy food that is thus beneficial to eat - a construction that has become common-sensical within the public arena.

### 3.8 Salad consumption

There has been much consumer research which proposes that women consume higher levels of salad than men (e.g. Marshall *et al.*, 1995 ). Moreover, results from the Scottish Heart Health Survey (Smith *et al.*, 1989) suggest that women eat more levels of all fruit and vegetables than their male counterparts. It is also claimed that there are fewer women consuming no fruit and vegetables. For example, more Scottish men (11.6%) eat no green vegetables than Scottish women (6.6%: Smith *et al.*, 1989). As salad vegetables such as lettuce and cucumbers are green vegetables, this notion characterises gender as of significance in relation to the consumption of salad.

While consumer research proposes that there are differences between men and women in the amount of salad consumed, it has been argued that for both sexes salad is the least popular way of eating vegetables (Scottish Office, 1993). The Scottish Opinion Survey (1992), for instance, claims to demonstrate this level of reticence by proposing that roughly one third of adults in Scotland eat salad less than once a month. Similarly, the results of the West of Scotland Twenty-07 Study have been taken to suggest that salad was rarely eaten in winter by 985

participants residing within the Greater Glasgow area (Anderson and Hunt, 1992). The participants in this study were aged 35 in 1987 and represented a cross section of the community. Under nine percent of these respondents reported eating salad more than three times a week in winter. Although this percentage increases to roughly a third of the survey population in the summer, this level is still low in accordance with ideals set out by health promoters (Scottish Office, 1993). As such, it has been argued that too small a quantity of salad is consumed by the majority to ensure good health (Anderson *et al.*, 1994). However, as I have discussed, it is men who have been constructed as consuming the smallest amount of salad of all.

### 3.9 Salad and Gender

One of the reasons that has been proposed for the gender differences in the consumption of salad is that this food is symbolically linked to notions of femininity. Lupton (1996) suggests that as a light food, salad is small, delicate and easier to digest. It thus meshes with notions of femininity which construct women as requiring less substantial foodstuffs. Moreover, salad is also commonly constructed as a food which is conducive to the maintenance or attainment of a slim body. As women are expected to live up to cultural ideals that require slimness (Hughes, 1990), salad has become associated with the dieting and weight loss activities undertaken by a number of women. However, it is not simply salad that has been linked to notions of femininity, but vegetables more generally. As Lupton (1996, p.107) suggests:

There is a symbiotic metaphorical relationship between femininity and vegetables: the eating of vegetables denotes femininity, while femininity denotes a preference for vegetables. A similar relationship exists for masculinity and meat eating.

Claims such as this formulate a symbolic relationship between notions of gender and particular foodstuffs, where one represents the other. Being a feminine food, salad is thus implicitly constructed as less relevant to men than foods such as meat. Related to this, it is argued, is the

assumption men require more substantial foods in larger quantities as a result pre-supposed physiological and behavioural differences (Charles and Kerr, 1988). Men are common-sensically thought to be more physically active (Ogden, 1992) and therefore require the greater level of nourishment that is generally considered to be contained within heavier foods such as meat. Salads may be assumed, as lighter foods, to fail to fulfil the requirements of the male body which, according to Bourdieu (1984, p.192), is culturally regarded as “a sort of power, big and strong, with enormous, imperative brutal needs”.

The requirement of men for nourishing and substantial food is a common-sense construction resonated within by many empirical studies. Moreover, the provision of such meals for men by women is often constructed as a central feature of family living. For example, an ethnographic study by Murcott (1983) proposed that substantial meals such as the ‘cooked’ dinner played an important symbolic function within working class South Wales households. A cooked dinner represented the nature of the domestic arena and the power relationships manifest within it. The time and effort invested by women in preparing a cooked meal symbolised the significance of the family and the dominance of the male (Murcott, 1983). In this sense, the preparation of hot and substantial food by women for men was important because it represented women’s nurturing role, and their accordingly subordinate position, within the family. However, the explanations produced by respondents in such studies often construct this meal as best providing for the needs and preferences of the male. Charles and Kerr (1988), for example, report that a respondent in their study of 200 working class women proposed (*op.cit.*, p.73):

I used to buy fresh meat, vegetables, potatoes, fresh greens, just a meal. Unless I do a meal like that he won’t class it as a meal: if I do a salad it’s not a meal to him....I’ve got to do a meal with meat, vegetables and potatoes..he expects a hot meal and I think he deserves it.

Charles and Kerr (1988) interpret this statement as an assertion that salad is not classed as a meal by this respondent’s male partner, whose expectation and desire is for hot and substantial food.

In other research, such an expectation is constructed as the basis of men refusing to eat salad - a common state of affairs. In a study by Marshall *et al.* (1995, p.190), the authors produce this claim on the basis of the following assertion provided by a female respondent in one of eight group discussions: "I make a salad and he turns his nose up at it".

I have so far examined the way in which existing research has formulated salad as not a preference of men on the basis of it failing to fulfil male needs and desires for hot and substantial food. Moreover, symbolically, salad is a food commonly associated with women due to its links to notions of femininity and weight loss.

### 3.10 Salad and health

While salad is commonly constructed as a female food, it is also increasingly being classified as a central part of a healthy diet. Such a classification is pre-dominant within academic knowledges which claim that both men and women in Scotland are, on average, eating fewer portions of fruit and vegetables than other regions in the UK (Scottish Office, 1993). This state of affairs has been constructed as problematic on the basis of low levels of consumption of fruit and vegetables being a significant factor in poor health (Marshall *et al.*, 1995). It is commonly argued (e.g. Anderson *et al.*, 1994) that an increased level of consumption of fruit and vegetables can decrease the risks of diseases such as coronary heart disease and cancer. It can also lower the rate of strokes within a population and limit the numbers suffering from constipation (Scottish Office, 1993).

At the present time, the consumption of fruit and vegetables by men and women in Scotland is constructed as inadequate to match the targets formulated by the Committee on Medical Aspects of Food Policy (1984) or indeed, the Scottish Office (1993). Consequently, public health bodies and media agencies alike have widely promoted the notion that fruit and vegetables are healthy and that a minimum of 5 portions should be consumed on a daily basis (Anderson *et al.*, 1994).

Salad, particularly, is generally classified by such knowledge as an extremely healthy form of vegetable intake due to its component raw vegetables. The promotion of salad in this way has resulted in the links between salad and health becoming common-sensical. Consequently, it may be a notion orientated toward in accounts of salad consumption.

### 3.11 Men's talk about salad

In this analysis I examine men's talk about salad. The extracts I present are responses to a number of questions about salad that were asked during the first interview. These questions ranged from simply "do you eat salad" to more challenging propositions such as "why don't you eat more salad".

In the first two extracts, I consider how respondents acknowledge that they eat do salad. In both these accounts, the speakers produce this claim in a manner designed to downplay the degree to which salad is a central feature of diet. Additionally, they describe the nature of the salad they consume in way that accentuates its substantial nature.

#### Extract 1 - R3I, pp.16

- |   |    |  |
|---|----|--|
| 1 | I: | do you eat salads  |
| 2 | R: | (.2) I don't mind a salad (.2) in the summer (.6) I mean (.) but again |
| 3 |    | that'll have meat in it  |
| 4 | I: | (.6) right   |
| 5 | R: | (.6) maybe er:: (.) sliced ham or pork or (.) you know (1) you         |
| 6 |    | kno::w me wife makes quite a good salad with a bit of everything       |
| 7 |    | on it (.) egg and coleslaw and potato stuff (.2) so it's a good mixed  |
| 8 |    | salad and with meat on it as well.                                     |

#### Extract 2 - R5I, pp.11

- |   |    |  |
|---|----|--|
| 1 | I: | do you eat lots of salads  |
| 2 | R: | (1) no::::o I wouldn't say lots (.) summer time we eat more salad    |
| 3 |    | yeah (.2) but again they tend to be with (.2) something (1) which is |
| 4 |    | usually some kind of er cold meat or (.) tuna or something like (.4) |
| 5 |    | ermm:mm (.) don't eat just kind of salad on its own.                 |



In extract 1, the speaker provides an indirect response to the question by stating “I don’t mind a salad” (line 2). This utterance proposes that salad is not objected to. It thus tacitly acts to formulate the speaker’s feelings toward salad as neutral: neither positive (liking) or negative (disliking). In extract 2, a more explicit statement regarding consumption is produced. In this extract the respondent suggests that the quantity of salads he consumes is less than the “lots” proposed by the question (“no:::o I wouldn’t say lots: line 2). By rejecting this proposition, he minimises the centrality of salad within his diet. Yet he subsequently states “summer time we eat more salad” (line 2). This claim works to characterise the consumption of salad as circumstantial: more is eaten during the summer. A similar proposition is made in extract 1 ( “I don’t mind a salad (.2) in the summer”). By characterising salad as a food primarily consumed during the summer months, the respondents downplay the likelihood of it being eaten in other circumstances. Implicitly, this minimises the degree to which it is a central feature of diet.

In both extracts the speakers also produce a description of the salad that they do consume in a manner designed to stress its substantial nature. In extract 1 on lines 2 to 8, the speaker states that the salad he consumes will contain meat (lines 2-5) and a variety of other substances. Note how he employs a three-part list (“egg and coleslaw and potato stuff”: lines 6-7) to give added impetus to his claim that this salad has a “bit of everything on it” (lines 6-7). Indeed, the extreme term “everything” produced in this utterance emphasises that salad is both varied and substantial: an emphasis similarly applied in a subsequent summary “so it’s a good mixed salad with meat on it as well” (lines 7-8).

The substantial nature of salad consumption is accentuated in a different way within extract 2. On lines 3 to 5 the speaker suggests that salad is eaten with something else (e.g. “they tend to be with (.2) something”: line 3). He produces two examples of such foods: cold meat and tuna (line 4) and then states “don’t just eat kind of salad on its own” (line 5). This latter utterance explicitly characterises salad as a food only ever eaten in conjunction with others, and thus stresses the substantial properties of a meal including salad.

In extract 3 the speaker produces a somewhat different description of the way salad is consumed to those observed in the previous two extracts. Yet in common with extract 2, this description similarly formulates salad as eaten in addition to other foods.

Extract 3 - R7I, pp.13

- |   |    |  |
|---|----|--|
| 1 | I: | how often do you eat (.) salads  |
| 2 | R: | (.4) depends how often Susan comes up with a meal like that              |
| 3 | I: | (3) and how often would that be on average                               |
| 4 | R: | (.4) at least (.) once (.4) at least once a week (2) well I said like we |
| 5 |    | have on Wednesday (.) fish and chips we have fresh fish (.4) done        |
| 6 |    | with some chips and loads of salad.                                      |

On line 4 the speaker states that he eats salad “at least once a week” (line 4). He subsequently describes one such occasion as when he eats fish and chips: “fish and chips we have fresh fish (.4) done with some chips and loads of salad” (lines 5-6). By stating that he has fish “done with” chips and salad, the speaker produces a list of the different foods that constitute this meal. By listing these foods in this way, he stresses its substantial properties. Moreover, by describing that the amount of salad consumed as part of this meal as “loads”, the speaker similarly highlights the notion of quantity.

In the three extracts I have considered so far, the descriptions of salad that have been produced have made reference, in one way or another, to the substantial properties of meals in which salad is consumed. Additionally, in extracts 1 and 2, I noted how salad was formulated as a non-central aspect of diet. This formulation implicitly downplays the degree to which salad is a preference as common-sense suggests foods that are enjoyed are eaten regularly. In the following two extracts I will consider how respondents claim explicitly that salad is not a food that would be, or is, selected on the basis of pleasure.

Extract 4 - R3I, pp.16

- 1 I: would you eat a green salad  
2 R: (1) I would eat it (.2) it wouldn't be something I would maybe go  
3 and order it but I wouldn't like leave it I wouldn't (.6) I could eat it..

Extract 5 - R1I, pp.19

- 1 I: (.4) how often do you eat vegetables  
2 R: (.2) every day (.2) everyday yeah (.4) raw for lunch an::d (.)  
3 steamed for tea (1) ermm:mm yeah vegetables everyday (.) quite a  
4 lot of vegetables everyday (.2) but either raw (.) raw at lunchtime  
5 and er (.) in the evening (.4) in the form of the main course (.)  
6 vegetable with the main course (.4) and or::r (.) another salad (.4)  
7 but I wouldn't (.2) I don't eat (.8) if I went into a restaurant I  
8 wouldn't order a salad (.) I find salads fairly dull things..

In extract 5 on line 7 the speaker suggests “if I went into a restaurant I wouldn’t order a salad” (line 7). A similar claim is produced by the respondent in extract 4 (“it wouldn’t be something I would maybe go and order”: lines 2-3). The proposition being made here is that salad would not be chosen in a context where ordering is normally required (such as a restaurant). Generally, such contexts are associated with pleasure. The speakers consequently infer that salad would not be selected on this basis.

Prior to this, in extract 4, the speaker states (lines 2-6) that he eats vegetables everyday in the general form of raw at lunchtime and steamed vegetables accompanying his main evening meal. Additionally he suggests that he may have another salad in the evening (thus implicitly formulating the raw vegetables eaten at lunchtime as salad). These claims work to suggest a large quantity of salad is being consumed. Consequently, his subsequent assertion that he would not order a salad may be a means through which a relevant common sense supposition - that they are eaten on the basis of pleasure (based on the presumption that a high level of consumption suggests enjoyment) - is undermined.

So far in the analysis I have looked at accounts that have described the consumption of salad, and a descriptive device (i.e. not ‘ordering’ it) which is employed to suggest it may not be

selected on the basis of pleasure. In the next three extracts I wish to explore some of reasons produced to explain why salad is consumed. In extract 6, the speaker proposes that salad is the most common way of enacting his intention to eat a healthy and low calorie meal during the week.

Extract 6 R1I, pp.16

- |   |    |   |
|---|----|---|
| 1 | I: | what about salads   |
| 2 | R: | (.2) yeah (.) what I try to do during the week is to try and have a   |
| 3 |    | healthy (.4) low calorie meal and what it usually ends up as is salad |
| 4 |    | with tomatoes in it..   |

On lines 2 to 3 the speaker first describes this intention (“what I try to do during the week is to try to have a healthy (.4) low calorie meal”) and subsequently explains how he fulfills it by saying “what it usually ends up as is salad with tomatoes” (lines 3-4). This description works to characterise salad as a means to an end (i.e. a way of eating a healthy, low calorie meal) and thus imply that it is a food selected for pragmatic purposes. By saying, “what it usually ends up as” (line 3), the speaker proposes that salad is simply the most usual way of fulfilling the intention to have a healthy, low calorie meal. By characterising the basis of his salad consumption in this way, other possible reasons for eating it (such as enjoyment) are tacitly formulated as of lesser relevance.

In common with the previous extract, the respondent in extract 7 also produces an explanation for eating salad that makes reference to pragmatic concerns. Yet in this extract, the speaker provides a second, circumstantial reason for consumption: the weather. In the following account, this respondent first acknowledges that not much salad is consumed in the winter (line 2) and accounts for this by working up a case involving the cold weather, the requirement for a hot meal and his desire not to cook and prepare a salad at the same time (lines 2-5). On line 5 he subsequently suggests that he eats more salad in the summer and justifies this state of affairs as the account unfolds.

Extract 7 - R8I, pp.13

- 1 I: why don't you eat more salads  
2 R: (1) I just well (.) in the winter it's too cold so I like to have a hot  
3 meal and having a hot meal and salad is just too much work I like  
4 you know cooking in one pan or the minimum number of pans  
5 and getting it over and done with (.2) in the summer I eat a lot more  
6 salads (1) ermm just because it's warmer and they're quick and easy  
7 to make.

On lines 6 to 7 the reasons produced for eating more salad during the summer are described as “it’s warmer and they’re quick and easy to make”. This reasoning characterises the basis of salad consumption as pragmatic (they are quick and easy to prepare) and, in common with extracts 1 and 2, circumstantial (eaten during warmer weather in the summer). The warmth of the weather is also a justification for eating salad that is produced in extract 8.

Extract 8 - R3I, pp.16-17 (continuation of extract 1)

- 12 R: ..as well (.4) they look nice (1) I think that's maybe what something  
13 about a salad it always looks (1) it always looks nice (1) but as I say  
14 it wouldn't be something I would (.4) er go out and (1) especially  
15 order (.) I think it's nice for a change in the summer because you  
16 get (.4) it's a warm day or it's the weather's nice and that and you  
17 just say I think we'll have a salad.

On line 15 the speaker suggests that salad is “nice for a change in the summer”. Note how this assertion characterises salad as a variation from what is regularly consumed (it is a ‘change’), and tacitly characterises the season as an important factor in the decision to eat a salad. He goes on to stress the importance of seasonal weather by producing a description of a particular circumstance where a salad may be consumed. On lines 16 to 17 he states “it’s a warm day or the weather’s nice and that you just say I think we’ll have a salad”. Again, warmth of the weather is characterised here the main reason for the consumption of salad.

In the previous three extracts, I have considered some of the reasons produced to account for eating salad. These reasons relate either to pragmatic concerns or the warmth of the weather

during the summer. Interestingly, neither of these justifications makes reference to notions of taste or pleasure as a basis for consumption. However, in the final extracts of the analysis, I wish to explore two accounts in which respondents do accentuate the pleasure they gain from salad. In the following extract the speaker first describes a time when he ate a considerable amount of salad.

Extract 9 - R4I, pp.13

- |   |    |   |
|---|----|---|
| 1 | I: | do you eat salads   |
| 2 | R: | (.) yep (.4) went through a phase of eating an enormous amount of       |
| 3 |    | salad again it goes back to this time when I was (.) basically (.4) a   |
| 4 |    | vegetarian (.8) for (.) for almost a year really (.) and I ate a ton of |
| 5 |    | salads I like salad dishes I really enjoy salad dishes that again I     |
| 6 |    | wouldn't have thought of touching er when I was er (.4) pre             |
| 7 |    | sixteen..   |

On lines 2 to 4 the speaker suggests that he ate lot of salad when he was a vegetarian (“went through a phase of eating an enormous amount of salad again it goes back to this time when I was (.) basically (.4) a vegetarian”). Note how he uses the terms “enormous” and “ton” to stress the amount eaten during this period. This claim is produced in relation to a question asking whether or not he currently eats salads (“do you eat salads”: line 1). While he initially provides a minimal affirmative response (“yep”: line 2) what is intriguing about his subsequent description is that it does not explicitly refer to what he currently eats. Yet in stressing the quantity consumed previously, the speaker infers that salad is a food that is consumed freely.

One reason for characterising salad in this manner may be a sensitivity to an inference that salad may not be eaten, or enjoyed. Indeed, the pleasure gained from salad is stressed on line 5. He states “I like salad dishes I really enjoy salad dishes”. By employing the phrase ‘really enjoy’, then speaker accentuates the pleasure he derives from salad. Salad is similarly formulated as gratifying in extract 10 in a manner that also seems sensitive to an expectation that salad may not be eaten or enjoyed.

- 1 I: do you eat salads  
2 R: (.4) plenty (3) as a matter of fact we do enjoy salad with er (.)  
3 certain dishes but in a great quantity too.

On line 2 the speaker states “as a matter of fact we do enjoy salad”. By use of the term “enjoy” within this assertion, he characterises salad as a food from which pleasure is derived. Additionally, the speaker also accentuates the quantity eaten through terms such as terms and phrases such as “plenty” (line 2) and “great quantity” (line 3). However, by describing his liking for, and high level of consumption of, salad as “a matter of fact” (line 2), this state of affairs is formulated as a revelation that may run contrary to what is expected.

### 3.12 Discussion

In this analysis all the speakers claim to eat salad. A number of interesting discursive actions are performed in relation to this claim that suggest a sensitivity to particular inferences arising from it. The first of these actions is the explicit rejection of pleasure as a reason for salad being consumed. In extracts 4 and 5, both speakers employ a descriptive device that characterises salad as a food that would not be chosen in a context that required food to be ordered (e.g. a restaurant). As the selection of food in such an environment is generally associated with notions of enjoyment, the speakers tacitly deny that salad is regarded in this way. In performing this action, the speakers display a sensitivity toward a possible supposition that salad is *enjoyed* - a common-sensical conclusion that may be arrived at on the basis of the claim that salad is eaten. Moreover, in extract 5 the speaker stresses his lack of enjoyment by asserting that he finds salads “fairly dull”.

While enjoyment is rejected as a reason for eating salads in extracts 4 and 5, a second action performed within these extracts is the construction of salad consumption as circumstantial. By describing salad as generally only eaten in specific circumstances, respondents downplay its

centrality within their diet. This action works rhetorically to reject any possible inferences that is consumed regularly - inferences that may also arise common-sensically from the claim that it is eaten. In extracts 1 and 2, for example, both speakers assert that salad is primarily (extract 2) or exclusively (extract 1) eaten during the summer months. Similarly, in extracts 7 and 8, the respondents propose that is warm weather during the summer that leads to salad being consumed. In extract 8 for example, the speaker describes his reasoning for deciding to eat a salad as "it's a warm day" or "the weather's nice". Moreover, this speaker also asserts that salad is enjoyed as a 'change' during the summer. This substantiates his construction of salad as a non-central aspect of diet.

One possible reason for the respondents' rejection of potential inferences that salad may be enjoyed or is a central feature of diet may be its construction as a light food of the kind that is suitable for attaining maintaining a low body weight (Lupton, 1996). Such a construction commonly results in the understanding that it is, for men, unfilling and insubstantial (e.g. Charles and Kerr, 1988). Certainly, a sensitivity to this notion was displayed in extracts 1 to 3. In these extracts, the respondents accentuate the substantial nature of meals involving salad that they consume. In extract 1, the respondent characterises the nature of the salad he eats as varied and substantial by listing the properties (such as meat) it contains. By producing this characterisation, he displays a sensitivity to the potential lack of substance of salads - and denies this in those he consumes.

In extracts 2 and 3, both speakers similarly accentuate the substantial nature of meals involving salad. In these extracts, the respondents formulate salad as a food eaten in conjunction with others such as meat (extract 2), or fish and chips (extract 3). In common with extract 1, the effect of this formulation is the implicit rejection of the notion that eating salad may involve the consumption of *insubstantial* meals.



I have so far considered how the claim that salad is consumed has resulted in a sensitivity toward potential inferences that are implicitly characterised as problematic and thus rejected. In contrast to this, an expectation that salad *may not* be consumed is also orientated toward within the extracts. One reason for this orientation may be the common construction of salad as a food men are reticent to eat (e.g. Charles and Kerr, 1988)

As I considered in the introduction, much consumer research has constructed men as less likely to eat salad than women. Moreover, men's dislike of salad is often formulated as a basis for their refusal to eat it (e.g. Marshall *et al.*, 1995). Knowledge regarding men's reticence toward salad is thus produced and re-produced within academic research and thus may also be a common-sense resource that is culturally available. Certainly, the speakers in extracts 9 and 10 seemed sensitive to an *expectation* that they would not like or eat salad. In these extracts the speakers produce accounts stressing both the quantity of salad consumed and the pleasure derived from its consumption. In doing so they act to reject any expectation that salad is in some way problematic. Moreover, in extract 10, the speaker characterises the claim that salad is eaten and enjoyed as a revelation that may run contrary to expectation - by use of the phrase "as a matter of fact".

While an expectation that salad may not be eaten or liked seemed relevant in extracts 9 and 10, in extract 1 the speaker also displayed sensitivity toward this notion. In this extract he responds to a question asking if he eats salad by saying "I don't mind a salad". This statement asserts that salad is not objected to. Consequently, any expectation to the contrary (i.e. that salad *would be* objected to) is rejected.

While the speakers in extracts 9 and 10 stress the degree to which they enjoy salad, as I have already considered, in other extracts enjoyment is rejected as a basis for consumption (e.g. extracts 4 and 5). As a final point in relation to this analysis, it is perhaps interesting to note the *variable* justifications that are produced for eating salad. While I have already made reference to

the notion of enjoyment (extracts 9 and 10) and that of warm weather (e.g. extracts 7 and 8), notions of health and weight are also produced in extract 6 as basis for consumption. In this extract the speaker asserts that he attempts to eat a "healthy" and "low calorie" meal during the week, and that this normally takes the form of salad. The link between salad and health, and its status as a low calorie food, is promulgated widely within popular culture and thus constitutes a resource to be drawn upon common-sensically (e.g. Scottish Office, 1993). A similarly culturally available understanding pertaining to salad is its status as a cold food requiring no cooking. In extract 7 this notion implicitly provides the basis of the speaker's assertion that salads are consumed because they are "quick and easy to make". The justification for eating salad produced by this assertion is thus based upon its construction as a convenient form of food.

### 3.13 Conclusion

In this analysis I have considered the ways in which salad is downplayed as a significant preference and feature of diet. One reason for this, I have suggested, may be its common construction as a light and insubstantial food - a construction to which a number of speakers seem to display a sensitivity. Respondents in some extracts also seem to orientate toward a potential expectation that salad will not be liked or consumed. In accentuating their liking for, and consumption of, salad this potential state of affairs is rejected.

In the third and final analysis of this chapter I now move on to consider how men talk about sweets and biscuits. This form of food is, in common with salad, often characterised as a feminine food. However, there are also a number of additional meanings commonly associated with sweets and biscuits that stress their complex cultural role.

### 3.14 Sweets and biscuits

It has been proposed that the confectionery market in the United Kingdom is currently worth over £3 billion every year (Euromonitor, 1995). Confectionery remains one of the most solid and sizeable food markets: more than two and a half times larger than the market for savoury snacks and biscuits (Euromonitor, 1995). The size of this market is representative of the significant cultural role played by sweet food. In this analysis I will consider how men talk about two such foods - sweets and biscuits. Before considering the extracts, I will briefly examine how the consumption of sweets and biscuits has been *constructed* by previous research. There are two predominant aspects of the knowledges that have been produced. The first of these pertains to the role and meaning of sweet food. The second formulates a close relationship between women and the consumption of sweet food.

### 3.15 The role and meaning of sweet food

It has been argued that sweet food is afforded a special place within most societies (Bryant *et al.*, 1985). One reason for this that has been proposed (e.g. Rozin, 1982) is that human beings possess an innate desire for sugar. Common-sensically, sugar is also often associated with the elicitation of specific physiological states. For example, certain sweet foods may be consumed on the basis of an assumption that they are energy-giving. Such a construction is certainly manifest within the promotional material produced by the manufacturers of confectionery products such as Snickers and Mars Bars (e.g. which enable the consumer to 'work, rest and play'). However, it has been proposed that a focus upon physiological notions such as this removes attention from the cultural role accorded to particular sweet foods. As Mintz suggests (1985, p.17-18):

To say that everyone everywhere likes sweet things says nothing about where such tastes fit into the spectrum of taste possibilities.

Many researchers have produced understandings of the role played by sugar and sweet foods within specific food systems. Often these pertain to the social relationships that underpin consumption (and production) practices. Mintz (1985), for example, proposes from a developmentalist perspective, that the high level of sugar consumption within the West can be traced back to the European sugar cane plantations in the West Indies and the rise of factory like time discipline within these colonies. As a consequence of such discipline, and other social and economic factors, sugar became mass-produced and thus lost its status as a luxury item available only to the upper classes. Instead, it became integral to the diet of the proletarian working class with a consequent 25 fold increase in its consumption in the eighteenth century and a further five fold increase in the subsequent nineteenth century period.

While the construction produced by Mintz (1985) focuses upon the interaction between economic, political and social realms with regards to the high level of sugar consumption in Europe, other researchers have produced understandings that relate explicitly to the particular cultural roles played by sweet foods. James (1990), for instance, has proposed that confectionery in particular is subject to a degree of ambiguity in relation to its social meaning. She argues that sweets are both food and non-food at the same time. They are food because they are physically eaten. At the same time they are not food because they are not generally consumed for nutritional purposes. Instead they often take the form of a treat - eaten for pleasure rather than nutrition (a similar proposition may also be made regarding many sweet biscuits). Certainly, confectionery does not fit into conventional understandings of the three-meal structure - the domain most commonly associated with nutritional intake. By contrast, other sweet foods, such as puddings and *some* biscuits, do (Douglas and Nicod, 1974).

As an additional item eaten outwith the context of the meal, sweets are commonly regarded as treats. However, other reasons for their consumption have been proposed. Greer (1990), for example, formulates the consumption of biscuits as primarily related to the boredom and frustration experienced by women in sedentary housewife occupations. By contrast, the

increased prevalence of grazing as a means of acquiring nutrition has been described as an increasingly common basis for sweet and biscuit consumption (e.g. Gofton, 1992).

While there may be differential reasoning for the consumption of sweets (and biscuits), their construction as an item eaten for pleasure is commonplace. However, this role has been constructed as potentially problematic. Douglas (1980) has argued that food has a strong moral dimension. Certain foods are culturally considered as *good* and others *bad*. Sweet food is often regarded as immoral because it is consumed on the basis of pleasure and thus as an indulgence (James, 1990). As such, it may be considered as symptomatic of a lack of self control or restraint.

As Ogden (1992, p.10) suggests:

a common belief is that if you look into a fat person's trolley at the check out you will find sweets, crisps and biscuits...they are fat because they stuff themselves with chocolate.

The construction of sweets as immoral and indicative of a lack of self-control meshes with additional understandings of their links to weight gain. Culturally, sweets and biscuits (by virtue of being eaten *additionally* and also their sugar and fat content) may be common-sensically formulated as fattening - and thus foods to avoid if a low weight is desired. Consequently, the notion of confectionery and biscuits as a 'treat' or 'luxury' is substantiated. Certain products have been constructed as particularly relevant to the role of confectionery as a luxury. One of these is the box of chocolates. A box of chocolates is generally considered as a gift. The practices associated with giving a gift of chocolate can be seen to communicate the luxurious meaning associated with confectionery. Moreover, they also work to represent particular social relationships such as gender (Mintz, 1985). Barthel (1989) has developed this argument by suggesting that the unequal relations of power that are a feature of gender relationships, are cemented by the gift of a box of chocolates. As she states (*op.cit.*, p.433):

A gift of chocolate implies an act of patronage. Like most gifts it goes from the powerful to the less powerful...from men to women.

Barthel (1989) constructs the box of chocolates as not only communicating 'luxury' by virtue of its content, but also as a metaphor for social relationships such as those between men and women. To substantiate this proposition, she goes on to draw attention to the design of the box itself. By citing boxes which depict luxury shopping districts (e.g. Quality Street), she argues that certain products are designed to emphasise women's role in purchasing goods. Others, such as Black Magic, represent an "essential step in seduction" (*op.cit.*, p.433).

### 3.16 Sweet food and femininity.

The arguments of Barthel (1989) formulate the box of chocolates as symbolically linked to notions of gender via the gift giving relationship. Such links to gender have also been stressed as significant by other understandings pertaining to sweet food. These understandings have constructed sweet food as inextricably linked to notions of femininity. As Lupton suggests (1996, p.105):

Chocolate and sugar are traditionally coded as feminine foods: according to the nursery rhyme, little girls are made of sugar and spice and all things nice.....Contributing to the sweet foods/femininity conflation is the discourse of women as civilising forces, the source of gentility and delicacy in habits and manners. the wedding cake, in form, shape and colour, is a mimesis of the virginal young bride...symbolising femininity and purity.

Lupton's argument here constructs sweet food as symbolising and representing notions of femininity. James (1990) produces a similar construction, drawing attention to metaphors such as 'sweetness' and 'honey' that are frequently associated with women. Her proposition is that the use of these metaphors serves to maintain the linkage between sweet foods and women. It has also been proposed that this link is also sustained through the common formulation of a problematic relationship to food experienced by many women. The pleasure often gained from

the consumption of chocolate, for example, can lead to problems of addiction. The majority of those addicted to chocolate, as self-identified chocoholics, are women (Barthel, 1989).

As a result of their association with pleasure, Kerr and Charles (1986) argue that sweets and biscuits are often eaten by women as a means of comfort. The need for comfort results from the lack of power women have available to them in their material lives (Kerr and Charles, 1986). Foods such as sweets that offer pleasure serve as a comfort from the frustrations of powerlessness. While sweet food may be regarded as a source of pleasure, it was regarded as problematic by many respondents in their study of the views of 200 working class women - commonly resulting in feelings of guilt. Consequently, they argue, sweet food is (*op.cit.*, p.571-572):

at the same time a friend and an enemy. A friend because its consumption gives pleasure and comfort, an enemy because its consumption leads to an increase in body size. Women are constantly trying to reduce, or increase, their body size so it will conform to the ideal...women's relationship to food is thus a function of their marginal and powerless position in society.

Kerr and Charles (1986) thus construct sweet food for women as a means of comfort but at the same time the basis for feelings of anxiety and guilt due to its association with weight gain. In this respect, the links between sweets and femininity resonate with unequal relations of power. The notion of power has been characterised as important. It has been argued that the link between women and sweets symbolically represents women's structural position within society as subordinate to men. This lack of power they have in common with children - a parallel that is reflected in notions often associated with sweets. As Lupton suggests (1996, p.109):

sugar and sweet foods as depicted as indulgences, easy to eat and digest, as decorative and pretty, pale coloured, the foods of childhood. So too, women are often represented as decorative, anodyne, delicate, less intelligent and far more childlike than men.

In addition to power, the issue of status is also relevant. Sweet foods associated with women and children are of lesser status than masculine foods such as meat (Lupton, 1996). Foods associated with pleasure and not nutritional gain are regarded as 'additional' and consequently less important.

### 3.17 Men's talk about sweets and biscuits

As I have considered, sweets and biscuits have been generally constructed as feminine foods. They have also been formulated as eaten for pleasure and not nutritional gain. Additionally, I have made reference to understandings that construct sweet food, for example, as an innate preference or associate it with a lack of self-control. In the following analysis, I examine how men talk about sweets and biscuits. The extracts I consider were produced in response to questions asking if sweets and biscuits were eaten or enjoyed. These questions were asked during the first interview.

In the first four extracts of the analysis, the speakers acknowledge liking foods such as sweets and biscuits. Additionally, they implicitly displace any common-sense assumptions that this state of affairs leads to their purchase or consumption. Take, for example, extracts 1 and 2:

#### Extract 1 - R8I, pp.7

- |   |    |  |
|---|----|--|
| 1 | I: | do you like sweets                                 |
| 2 | R: | (1) I do like sweets but I don't buy them erm::m.. |

#### Extract 2 - R3I, pp.4

- |   |    |   |
|---|----|---|
| 1 | I: | do you enjoy sweets (.6) and biscuits and things=                   |
| 2 | R: | =I don't (.) well I do but I'm not a (.2) I'm not a biscuit eater.. |

In extract 1 the speaker suggests that he does like sweets (line 2). A similar assertion is made in extract 2 ("well I do": line 2). In both extracts the respondents produce a second and subsequent claim concerning their practices. In extract 1 the speaker states "but I don't buy them" (line 2).



This proposition suggests that sweets are not actively acquired. An equivalent assertion pertaining to consumption is produced in extract 2: “but I’m not (.2) I’m not a biscuit eater” (line 2). This utterance is employed to suggest he is not the type of person who eats biscuits regularly. Taken in relation to the prior claim that he does enjoy sweet foods (such as biscuits), the speaker displaces any common-sense presumptions that this appreciation leads to consumption. A similar effect is produced in extract 1 through the assertion that sweets are not purchased.

In common with the two previous extracts, the speaker in extract 3 produces a claim regarding his practices subsequent to an acknowledgement that he does like, in this instance, chocolate (an acknowledgment provided on line 4).

#### Extract 3 - R2I, pp.03

- |   |    |  |
|---|----|--|
| 1 | I: | do you like sweets and biscuits                                    |
| 2 | R: | (.) Oh very se- (.) well (2) sweets ermm::mm t::he confectionery   |
| 3 |    | people would go out of business if they were dependent on me I (1) |
| 4 |    | I like chocolate but I just deliberately don't take it emmm..      |

In this extract, the speaker states that he doesn’t eat chocolate, despite liking it (I assume the word “take” to mean this: lines 3-4). A related point is made prior to this by means of a more general assessment of his sweet eating practices. This assessment is produced hypothetically: “the confectionery people would go out of business if it they were dependent on me” (lines 2-3). Such an assessment minimises the degree to which sweets are purchased by formulating the value of his custom to confectioners as negligible. In essence, the speaker downplays the degree to which he buys sweets.

A second interesting feature of this extract is the way in which the speaker employs the term “deliberately” to suggest that his not consuming chocolate is a conscious decision. In being subject to such intent, eating chocolate is characterised as an act that would otherwise take place. Consequently, the speaker characterises his decision to not eat it as restraint.

In contrast to the previous three extracts, the speaker in the following extract suggests that he both likes and eats sweets such as chocolate bars and biscuits (lines 3-4).

Extract 4 - R5I, pp.05

- |   |    |   |
|---|----|---|
| 1 | I: | what about (.) other kinds of sugary things like you know (.) |
| 2 |    | chocolate biscuits  |
| 3 | R: | (.4) ermm:mm yeah I like (.) I like chocolate bars and I like |
| 4 |    | chocolate biscuits but again I don't eat that many..          |

Yet on line 4 he formulates the amount he eats as moderate by stating “but again I don’t eat that many”. This statement is rhetorical as it implicitly undermines any common sense suppositions that liking chocolate may lead to immoderate levels of consumption.

In the four extracts I have considered so far, the speakers have produced a claim asserting that few sweets or biscuits, if any, are purchased or consumed (despite being liked). In the following three extracts, by contrast, I will examine some of the different ways in which the consumption of sweets is described. In these extracts, all speakers make reference to specific circumstances within which sweet consumption takes place. In extract 5, for example, the respondent proposes that sweets are generally consumed after physical exercise.

Extract 5 - R8I, pp.01 (continuation of extract 1)

- |    |    |  |
|----|----|--|
| 1  | I: | do you like sweets   |
| 2  | R: | (1) I do like sweets but I don't buy them arm::m (1) say if I (.) like I   |
| 3  |    | say if I've been out running or doing something energetic I::ll            |
| 4  |    | usually fancy sweets then (1) I usually like I'm coming home from          |
| 5  |    | swimming I usually fancy a Mars bar (.) so (1) quite often I'll have       |
| 6  |    | one then ermm::mm (2) if I've not been doing anything I find               |
| 7  |    | sweets pretty sickly though (1) you know I've had (.) I've (.) I often     |
| 8  |    | find actually that I::I quite fancy the taste of certain things (3) you    |
| 9  |    | know it's as if my body needs certain things like ermm if I've been        |
| 10 |    | sweating a lot I usually fancy something sal-salty as if I need to         |
| 11 |    | place the salt and I don't know if that's kind of my body demanding        |
| 12 |    | salt or if I don't know it's a kind of learned reaction that I have (.) so |
| 13 |    | you know if I've been doing something like that if I've been out for       |
| 14 |    | a long run (1) and I feel a bit you know (.) if I feel a bit knackered or  |
| 15 |    | something then I'd want sweets then I'd buy a can of Lucozade or a         |
| 16 |    | Mars bar or something like that (.) erm::mm.                               |

On lines 3 to 5 the suggestion is made that a desire for sweets generally arises in the context of exercise: "if I've been out running or doing something energetic I'll usually fancy sweets then". Inferentially, such an assertion characterises physical activity as the basis of his craving for sweets (one "usually" follows the other). An assessment of why this is so is provided on lines 8 to 9 where the respondent states "you know it's as if my body needs certain things". This assessment formulates his desire for sweets as a consequence of bodily need. To work up this formulation, prior to its explicit articulation, the speaker produces two descriptions that are designed to demonstrate the link between physical activity and his craving for sweets. The first (lines 4-5) is an example of a specific form of exercise (swimming) that normally results in a desire for a Mars Bar. This desire, the respondent suggests, frequently results in consumption: "quite often I'll have one then" (lines 5-6). The second description produced is more subtle. On lines 6 to 7 the speaker suggests "if I've not been doing anything I find sweets pretty sickly though". This statement suggests that sweets are experienced as somewhat distasteful if, prior to consumption, no exercise has been undertaken. It thus implicitly warrants the link between a desire for sweets and exercise: by implying an oppositional effect to craving (i.e. distaste) arising from sweets being eaten outwith the context of exercise. By using the phrase 'find them pretty sickly' to characterise his lack of enjoyment, the speaker formulates the basis of his reaction in physical terms ('sickly' denoting a physiological ingestive response). This is important because the physical basis of this response meshes readily with the notion of bodily (and, thus physical) need: a notion implied by his examples of circumstances leading to his craving (and distaste of) sweets and subsequently directly stated.

The claim that sweets are desired (and consumed) after exercise on the basis of need is warranted in two ways as the account unfolds. First, the speaker provides an example of a second kind of craving he encounters: a desire for salt after sweating (9 to 12). This example of a different need adds robustness to the claim that sweets desired on the basis of bodily requirement. Any suppositions that bodily need is employed as a means of justifying the

consumption of sweets is thus undermined (as it is implicitly classified as a more global process relevant to other substances). Note here that the speaker provides two possible explanations for such a process: a physical demand or a learned reaction (lines 11-12). Both of these characterise the basis of requiring a substance in a particular context as outwith the realm of conscious reasoning. Consequently, its formulation as a process *experienced* as a bodily need appears reasonable.

The second warrant produced in this account is an additional example of a situation involving exercise and thus invoking the desire for, and subsequent consumption of, sweets or soft drinks containing energy-giving properties (lines 13-16). Again, this formulates the basis of the desire for sweets as exercise and thus highlights the circumstantial basis (i.e. physical activity) of sweet consumption.

As I have considered, in this extract the speaker claims that sweets are desired (and consumed) after exercise on the basis of physical need. In producing this claim, he suggests that outwith the context of exercise, sweets are considered distasteful (i.e. they are found “pretty sickly”). It is thus the context of exercise that is described as the basis of the speaker’s consumption of sweets. In the following extract, the respondent similarly claims that sweets are only eaten in a particular circumstance.

Extract 6, ABI, pp.03 (continuation of extract 3)

- |    |    |   |
|----|----|---|
| 1  | I: | do you like sweets and biscuits                                       |
| 2  | R: | (.) Oh very se- (.) well (2) sweets ermm::mm t::he confectionary      |
| 3  |    | people would go out of business if they were dependent on me I (1)    |
| 4  |    | I like chocolate but I just deliberately don't take it emmm I like    |
| 5  |    | most sweets the only time I eat sweets is a long car journey at one   |
| 6  |    | time they used to say I had a quarter of sweets to a gallon of petrol |
| 7  |    | which ]   |
| 8  | I: | [ha ha  |
| 9  | R: | was a slight exaggeration ermmm::mm (1) on a long journey I           |
| 10 |    | chew but that's the only time I eat sweets..                          |

On line 5 this respondent suggests that he eats sweets during a “long car journey”. This is described as the “only time” (line 5 and line 10) they are eaten. The respondent also produces an implicit explanation as to why sweets are consumed in this situation. He states, on lines 9 to 10, “on a long journey I chew”. His use of the term ‘chew’ formulates the kind of sweets consumed (as only certain sweets are generally considered ‘chewable’). However, additionally, it also makes relevant the act of consumption which is thus characterised as significant. This characterisation implies that a long car journey produces a desire to eat in this way. As common sense suggests that a long car journey may be associated with notions such as tiredness and boredom, factors such as these may be implicitly formulated as the reason for his chewing sweets in this context.

In common with the previous two extracts, in extract 7 the respondent claims to eat sweets in a specific circumstance. On line 3, after a long pause, he initially responds to a general question about sweets by saying “no (.) not before a meal (.2) I hardly have sweets”. This utterance formulates his consumption of sweets as minimal. Yet he subsequently produces an example of a context in which sweets may be eaten.

#### Extract 7 - R71, pp.06

- |   |    |   |
|---|----|---|
| 1 | I: | what about (.) sweets   |
| 2 | R: | (2)   |
| 3 |    | no (.) not before a meal (.2) I hardly have sweets it depends     |
| 4 |    | occasionally if I get a box that is (.) you know on a festive day |
| 5 |    | sometime (.6) somebody is generous and brings me a box (.2) then  |
| 6 |    | I might have some sweets yes (.6) but I do not carry and I do not |
| 7 |    | buy out of choice.  |

On lines 4 to 5 he states “occasionally if I get a box that is (.) you know on a festive day sometime (.6) somebody is generous and brings me a box”. It is the context of being given a box of chocolates that is formulated as a potential basis for eating sweets. On lines 5 to 6 he suggests “then I might have some sweets yes”. By claiming that he only “might” eat some sweets when presented with a box as a gift, the speaker asserts that this circumstance does not necessarily invoke consumption. Consequently, he implicitly formulates his approach to sweets

as nonchalant as it may normally be expected that sweets would be consumed in such circumstances. The situational basis of his consumption of sweets is warranted on lines 6 to 7: “but I do not carry and I do not buy out of choice”. This utterance proposes that sweets are not actively acquired or possessed: the implication being that they are thus not consumed outwith the gift-giving context.

In the three previous extracts, the respondents have proposed that they consume sweets in specific circumstances. This proposition has involved two claims being developed. First, that the consumption of sweets is provoked by a specific contextual factor (craving after exercise, a long car journey or being given a box of chocolates: extracts 5, 6 and 7 respectively). Second, that sweets are not generally consumed outwith this particular circumstance. This claim is articulated explicitly, as I have observed, in extracts 6 and 7. In extract 5 a similar supposition arises from the proposal that sweets eaten outwith the context of exercise are distasteful (‘pretty sickly’). Inferentially, these descriptions work to downplay the amount of sweets that are eaten, and thus warrant the prior assertion (made by all speakers) that few sweets, if any, are consumed.

In the two extracts that follow, I wish to consider a descriptive strategy in which speakers similarly claim to consume few sweets and biscuits. However, in these extracts, the respondents develop a contrast between their wives’ consumption of sweets and their own. This stresses their (the speakers) indifferent approach towards such food. I will first consider extract 8.

#### Extract 8 - R6I, pp.09

- |    |    |  |
|----|----|--|
| 1  | I: | what about things like chocolate   |
| 2  | R: | (3)  |
| 3  |    | hot chocolate or just  |
| 4  | I: | (.8) chocolate   |
| 5  | R: | (.4) chocolate chocolate   |
| 6  | I: | (.2) yeah chocolate chocolate  |
| 7  | R: | (.2) chocolate chocolate (2) n::ow if you'd asked my wife ha ha ha       |
| 8  |    | (.4) er I mean one of the big bars of chocolate if it was lying down     |
| 9  |    | there I mean she wouldn't rise from there until it was finished er       |
| 10 | I: | (.) ha ha  |
| 11 | R: | (.8) she gets quite annoyed at me at times when not I mean I might       |
| 12 |    | take one piece and say now that's fine thanks (.6) er::r that's it and I |

13                      won't take any more (.) and she will say if you just take the other  
14                      half of it it'll save me eating it.

In his account, the speaker suggests that questions regarding chocolate may be of more relevance to his wife (“now if you’d asked my wife”: line 7). The reason for this, he proposes, is that she exhibits a greater propensity to consume it than he does. On lines 8 to 9, the respondent describes his wife’s typical reaction to the availability of a bar of chocolate: “I mean one of the big bars of chocolate if it was lying down there I mean she wouldn’t rise from there until it was finished”. Note the use of the term “big” here to emphasise the amount of chocolate actually consumed. Moreover, on lines 13 to 14 the speaker suggests his wife will appeal to him to eat half of such a bar to “save” her from eating it herself. To require saving in this way, his wife is rendered powerless. Her consumption of chocolate is thus implicitly characterised as uncontrolled and, indeed, problematic (hence the request for him to eat more of the bar) .

By contrast, the respondent characterises his own behaviour in the same circumstance as moderate. He states, on lines 11 to 13, “I might take one piece and say now that’s fine thanks (.6) er::r that’s it and I won’t take any more”. Both the minimal amount of chocolate consumed (one piece only) and the possibility that even this will not be eaten (he “might” eat one piece) work to formulate this approach as nonchalant. Indeed, by producing a description of his wife’s reaction to such insouciance (“she gets quite annoyed with me at times”: line 11), the speaker warrants his assertion that they have a contrasting approach (it is not simply his *interested* interpretation of this state of affairs, but a shared understanding).

By employing a contrast, the speaker in this previous extract highlights his indifference towards sweets. A contrast is also employed in extract 9 to similar effect.

Extract 9 - R3I, pp.04 (continuation of extract 2)

1            I:        do you enjoy sweets (.6) and biscuits and things=  
2            R:        =I don't well I do but I'm not a (.2) I'm not a biscuit eater I can sit

3                   and not bother with a biscuit (.6) me wife now (.6) will buy biscuits  
4                   in and buy sweets in and bars of chocolate and that wouldn't (1)  
5                   that doesn't bother me..

On line 3 the respondent suggests that he can “sit and not bother with a biscuit”. This utterance implies that he is not particularly concerned about eating biscuits. By contrast, he proposes that his wife will actively acquire sweet foods (“me wife now will (.6) will buy biscuits in and buy sweets in and bars of chocolate”: line 4). Note the deployment of a three-part list of such foods to highlight her propensity to purchase these. A contrast is thus developed between this propensity and the speaker’s lack of interest (which is substantiated on lines 4 to 5: “that wouldn’t (1) that doesn’t bother me”). This contrast thus warrants the speaker’s prior assertion that he is not a “biscuit eater” (line 2).

In the previous two extracts, I have explored a descriptive strategy in which the respondents stress their lack of concern to eat sweets and biscuits. This action works to minimise the likelihood of consumption. In the final two extracts of the analysis I wish to examine a different way in which such indifference is made relevant. In these accounts, both speakers describe a situation where sweets are available, but formulate their reaction to this as one of disinterest.

Extract 10 - R2I, pp.03. (continuation of extract 6)

16           R:       ..I can go from Sunday to Sunday without having a sweet at all and  
17                   they're in the car all the time but not a temptation to me we've a  
18                   there (.) full of wee mars bars and all the rest of it..

Extract 11 R3I, pp.03 (continuation of extract 9)

10           R:       ..if there's a bar of chocolate in the fridge or if there's a box of  
11                   sweets I just::t I wouldn::t (.) it just doesn't interest us (1) I don't eat  
12                   between meals..

In extract 10, on lines 17 to 18, the respondent produces two examples of situations where sweets are available to him. He states they are both “in the car all the time” and in a drawer at home (“we’ve a drawer there (.) full of wee mars bars and all the rest of it”). In extract 11, similarly,



two contexts within which sweets are accessible are described: “if there’s a bar of chocolate in the fridge or if there’s a box of sweets” (lines 10-11).

Both speakers propose that the availability of sweets in these situations does not generally lead to consumption. In extract 11, the respondent states “ I wouldn’t (.) it just wouldn’t interest us” (line 11). This utterance formulates his reaction to the availability of sweets as one of indifference. The gist here is thus that they would not be eaten - a supposition warranted on lines 11-12: “I don’t eat between meals” (the implication here is that sweets or biscuits, which are commonly eaten between meals, are therefore not consumed).

In extract 10 the respondent likewise proposes that sweets are not eaten when at hand. On line 17 he suggests that sweets are not a ‘temptation’ to him despite being constantly accessible (i.e. in the car all the time: line 17). This utterance downplays the likelihood that sweets are consumed by formulating his reaction to their availability, in common with the previous extract, as one of nonchalance (i.e. they are not a temptation). Moreover, the preceding statement “ I can go from Sunday to Sunday without having a sweet at all” (line 16) similarly formulates the availability of sweets in different contexts (claims produced as the account unfolds) as unlikely to lead to consumption. By suggesting it is possible that he may not consume any sweets in a week, the speaker implicitly minimises the amount he eats more generally. He does this before asserting that sweets are available to him in a number of contexts. Consequently, the implication which arises is that sweets being readily accessible does not normally result in their being eaten: hence an indifferent approach.

### 3.18 Discussion

There are a number of interesting features of the extracts that I have considered in this analysis. Many of these relate to the rejection of sweets and biscuits as items that are consumed or desired. In the first four extracts the speakers all produce claims that are designed to downplay the degree to which sweets and biscuits are eaten. For example, in extracts 1 to 3, the respondents assert that they don't buy sweets (extract 1), don't habitually eat biscuits (extract 2) and buy very little confectionery and no chocolate (extract 3). In extract 4, after stating that he does like chocolate bars and biscuits the speaker asserts that he does not eat 'that many'. Consequently, he also downplays the degree to which they are consumed.

As I noted in the analysis, claims designed to downplay consumption were provided subsequent to an acknowledgment that sweets or biscuits were enjoyed. Moreover, this acknowledgment was itself produced in response to questions asking whether or not foods such as sweets and biscuits were liked. By making relevant the notion of consumption, the speakers thus display a sensitivity towards the possible expectation that liking sweets will result in their consumption. This expectation is certainly common-sensical, as liking a particular food is a common basis for eating it. However, additionally, the common construction of sweets and biscuits as foods eaten for pleasure and enjoyment (e.g. James, 1990) may give added impetus to expectations that they will be consumed. This construction of sweets and biscuits may also result in the supposition that they may be eaten in large quantities. Certainly in extract 4, the speaker seemed sensitive to the potential inference that chocolate bars and biscuits may be consumed immoderately. In this extract the speaker rejects this potential state of affairs by stating that he doesn't eat "that many".

In common with extract 4, the respondents in extracts 5 to 7 do acknowledge eating sweets and biscuits. However, they formulate consumption as only occurring within specific

circumstances. For example, in extract 5 the speaker develops the proposition that he consumes sweets only after exercise. The consumption of sweets in other contexts is implicitly undermined by the suggestion that outwith this context, he finds them “pretty sickly”. In extracts 6 and 7, the speakers also stress that the circumstance they describe is the only context within which sweets may be consumed. In extract 7 this speaker suggests that he may eat sweets if he is given a box of chocolates. In extract 8, it is a long car journey which is produced as the basis for sweet eating by the respondent.

By formulating their consumption of sweets as circumstantial in this way, the speakers downplay the likelihood of many being consumed. Certainly, common-sense would suggest that contexts such as those proposed by speakers in extract 6 (a long car journey) and extract 7 (being given a box of chocolates on a festive day) are not regular and frequent. Moreover, in each of these extracts the speakers, by describing a specific circumstance within which sweet consumption *exclusively* takes place, implicitly formulate this context as provoking consumption. For example, by asserting that he will *only* eat sweets in a situation where he is given a box of chocolates, the respondent in extract 7 characterises this specific state of affairs as the primary basis for their consumption. This characterisation works rhetorically to undermine the relevance of non-circumstantial factors that may cause him to eat sweets outwith of that particular context. One such factor may be the enjoyment commonly associated with sweets and biscuits. Consequently, the speakers may display a sensitivity to a possible expectation that sweets are enjoyed and thus consumed regularly. By making relevant the occasioned nature of consumption, such an inference is denied.

So far in this discussion I have considered the way in which inferences regarding the likelihood of sweet and biscuit consumption are orientated toward, and rejected, by speakers. In addition, I have considered how speakers display a sensitivity to the expectation that as a consequence of their construction as particularly pleasurable, sweets and biscuits may be eaten immoderately (extract 4) or on a regular and non-occasioned basis (extracts 5-7). In

extracts 10 and 11 the respondents orientate toward another inference that may arise from the construction of sweets and biscuits as pleasurable - the assumption that they will be experienced as a temptation.

In both these extracts the speakers describe contexts where sweet and biscuits are freely available and thus may be consumed. For example, in extract 10 the speaker suggests that sweets are in his car all of the time and that they are also in a drawer at home. However, he subsequently asserts that he does not regard these a temptation. Similarly, in extract 11 the respondent states that the availability of sweets "doesn't bother" him. By producing these claims, the speakers formulate their approach to sweets as one of indifference. In common with the other extracts I have considered so far, this formulation works to downplay the likelihood that sweets are consumed. However, in performing this action, the speakers implicitly orientate towards a construction of sweets as potentially tempting and desirable.

In all the extracts in this analysis, the speakers downplay the consumption of sweets and biscuits. There are a number of possible reasons why speakers perform this action. One of these relates to the construction of sweets and biscuits as 'additional' items eaten outwith the context of meals for pleasure (e.g. Barthel, 1989). Certainly, in extract 12, the speaker orientates to the construction of sweets as additional items by producing the assertion that he doesn't eat between meals - as a means of warranting his claim that he doesn't consume them. As I have considered, the formulation of sweets and biscuits as pleasurable but additional has been constructed as meshing with notions of immorality (James, 1990) or a lack of self-control (Ogden, 1992). Constructions of foods eaten for enjoyment, or in addition to meals, may thus be formulated in negative terms as a consequence of notions such as these. Consequently, one reason for downplaying the consumption of sweets and biscuits may be a sensitivity to such understandings.

The common-sense association between sweets, biscuits and weight gain can also be related to the construction of these foods as pleasurable extras. This association is manifest with understandings stressing women's problematic relationship to sweets and biscuits. Understandings such as those produced by Kerr and Charles (1986) propose that many women experience guilt and anxiety with regards to their consumption of sweets and biscuits, as a consequence of these foods being constructed as invoking weight gain. Such understandings are embedded within a large body of knowledge stressing the close relationship between women and the consumption of sweets and biscuits. Consequently, a second reason for downplaying the consumption of these foods may be the common-sense understanding of sweets and biscuits as foods particularly desired and eaten by women.

In extracts 8 and 9 the relevance of this understanding may be displayed tacitly. In these extracts, the speakers develop a contrast between their wife's un-restrained consumption of available chocolate (extract 8) and active purchase of sweets and biscuits (extract 9), and their own approach which is characterised contrastingly as indifferent. By formulating their wife's relationship to sweets and biscuits in this way, the construction produced resonates with the common-sensical understanding that women particularly desire these foods.

By developing a contrast between their approach and that of their wives, the respondents reject any inferences that they eat sweets immoderately when available or actively buy sweets and biscuits - inferences which may arise in connection with the construction of sweets and biscuits as particularly pleasurable forms of food. However, while these inferences may be orientated toward by speakers, in this analysis a number of reasons unconnected to the notion of pleasure were produced for the consumption of sweets and biscuits. These reasons draw upon a number of contrasting understandings regarding sweet food.

In extract 5, for example, the speaker asserts that he eats sweets as a result of bodily need after exercise. This assertion characterises the basis of his sweet eating as a physiological

requirement - a characterisation that resonates with knowledges of sweet food as of nutritionally significant for energy replenishment. Such knowledges may have become common-sensical as a consequence of their deployment as a basis for the marketing of products such as Mars Bars (a sweet which is, interestingly, described by the speaker as craved after a particular form of exercise). In extracts 6 and 7 different justifications are produced for the consumption of sweets and biscuits. In extract 7 the reasoning described is being given chocolates as a gift - a proposition that draws upon common-sensical constructions of the role of a box of chocolates (e.g. Barthel, 1989). By contrast, the consumption of sweets on the basis of a desire to chew during a long car journey is described by the respondent in extract 6.

### 3.19 Conclusion

All respondents in this analysis produce accounts that display a sensitivity to inferences arising in connection the claim that sweets and biscuits are liked. One such inference is that these foods will be consumed, or eaten immoderately. In these extracts the speakers design their accounts to downplay the level of their sweet and biscuit consumption and stress its minimal nature. Moreover, a number of respondents also seem to orientate toward an expectation that these foods will be found tempting - a potential state of affairs that is rejected by the indifferent approach they characterise.

In the previous three analyses I have considered how men talk about particular foods. In the next chapter I move on to examine accounts pertaining to topics that are commonly constructed as potentially problematic. In chapter 4 I consider how men talk about weight, slimming and guilt. All of these topics are often associated with food consumption and thus constitute an interesting progression from the issues I have so far considered.

## **CHAPTER FOUR**

## 4.0 Problematic aspects of food

In this chapter I will examine how men talk about issues that are often constructed as a feature of a problematic relationship to food - such as a concern about weight, the purchase of slimming foods and feelings of guilt. Before considering the extracts, I will briefly examine how issues relating to these have been constructed by academic knowledges. The first issue I will consider is that of body image.

### 4.1 Body image

Many understandings have been produced that construct men and women as having different relationships to their bodies (e.g. McKie and Wood, 1991). Moreover, the importance of the body is commonly formulated as of greater significance to women. One reason for this proposed by academic knowledges is the manner in which women are culturally positioned as objects of the male gaze. As Berger (1972, p.47 ) suggests:

men act and women appear. Men look at women. Women watch themselves being looked at.

With such emphasis on the aesthetic, the way women look is claimed to be of prime significance.

Women are expected to live up to cultural ideals by appearing in a certain way. Such ideals are promulgated, for example, by media images manifest throughout 'consumer' culture (Featherstone, 1990). These images construct notions of desirability and sexual attractiveness as related, amongst other things, to physical size (Wolf, 1991). As Kerr and Charles (1986, pp.539) assert:

in our society the image of the sexually attractive female is one who is slim, bra-less and sporting all the latest in fashion...thus sliminess is equated with sexual attractiveness and beauty.



It has been argued that over the last 30 years, the pressure on women to attain the ideal slim body has increased substantially. Diamond (1985) argues that at one point in time a specific feature such as a good face would have been enough. Now, she suggests, that it is only perfection that will suffice.

Many women express a concern or dissatisfaction with their body-image. Indeed, the desire to lose weight and the use of various weight losing measures has been observed in pre-adolescent girls as young as seven (Maloney *et al.*, 1989). A desire to lose weight is also highly prevalent amongst adolescents. Wardle and Marlsand (1990) have claimed on the basis of empirical research that 50% of adolescent girls feel fat and wish to lose weight.

The dissatisfaction with body shape and size relevant to many females is frequently manifest in an over-estimation of how large they are. It is argued that specific parts of the body are most commonly judged to be larger than physical measures. These are thighs, abdomen and hips (Thompson, 1986). This distorted perception has been formulated as linked to measures of self-esteem. Studies claim to have associated low self-esteem and depression to distorted perceptions of body in women with normal and disordered eating (O'Dea, 1995).

To attain a slim body many women diet (McKie *et al.*, 1993). Certainly, it has been claimed that over 90% of all women have dieted at some point in their lives (Ogden, 1992). For a number of women, the attempt to lose weight becomes a central activity governing all corners of their existence (Orbach, 1978). Moreover, the significance of dieting to women is accentuated by understandings highlighting the multi-million pound slimming industry - producing videos, books, classes and even specially formulated foods for economic gain. Some theorists have gone so far as to suggest that dieting is culturally regarded as a positive feature of femininity. As Wolf (1991, p.200) suggests:

Dieting is the essence of contemporary femininity. Denying oneself food is seen as good in a women, bad in a man...the current successful and 'mature' model of femininity submits to a life of self-denial in her body.

So far I have considered how women's problematic relationship to weight has been constructed by existing research as based upon the desire to live up to cultural ideals of sliminess. Such a desire is problematic because it results in considerable dissatisfaction with body shape and size and is often the basis for dieting. A second issue increasingly stressed by knowledges of food is the growing importance of body size and shape to men. It is argued that men are coming under increasing pressure to live up to cultural 'ideals' as a consequence of media images stressing the significance of the male body (e.g. Connell, 1995). However, in contrast to women, men are encouraged to live up to ideals that are larger and mesomorphic in nature (Mishkind *et al.*, 1986).

Another reason that has been produced to explain the increasing significance of men's bodies is growing cultural emphasis on appearance for both men and women. Featherstone (1991), for instance, has proposed that in Western culture there is currently an increasing orientation to outer expression over inner experience. What he means by this is that the processes of consumption (such as clothing, diet etc.) are becoming increasingly important features of self identity. Management of the body through consumption practices such as exercise and diet have taken on increasing importance. As Giddens (1991, p.178) suggests:

The body cannot be any longer merely 'accepted', fed and adorned according to traditional ritual: it becomes a core part of the reflexive project of self-identity...a continuing concern with body development in relation to a risk culture is thus an intrinsic part of modern social behaviour.

While women have for a long time been the subject of cultural gaze (Berger, 1972), the point here is that the increasing link between consumption and self-identity accentuates the significance of the aesthetic for both women and men.

The increasing awareness of body amongst men has been constructed as leading to greater reported levels of male body dissatisfaction. However, in contrast to women, it has been proposed that a high proportion of men who express dissatisfaction do so in relation to being too small and thin (O'Dea, 1995). On the basis of a survey of 895 adolescent boys, Moore (1990) proposes that the majority of those dissatisfied with their body regarded themselves as underweight. He claims that the common desire amongst this sample was to increase arm and chest size and decrease the size of the abdomen. Similarly, in the adult population studies have claimed to demonstrate that men generally want to become bigger, taller and more muscular than they perceive themselves to be (O'Dea, 1995).

In contrast it has also been asserted that many males also express a desire to lose weight. Wertheim *et al.* (1992), for example, proposes on the basis of a sample of Australian school children, 34% of boys claim that they wish to decrease body size. Overweight men have similarly been characterised as desiring a reduction in their size. On the basis of a qualitative study involving 86 working class men, Egger and Mowbray (1993) claim that the vast majority of overweight men that took part in their research expressed a desire to lose weight.

While dissatisfaction with body size has been constructed as relevant to many men, it is argued that both food intake and exercise are employed as a means of bodily management through which men attempt to manipulate the size and shape of their body - either in terms of increasing or decreasing size. In relation to decreasing size, for example, Robison *et al.* (1993) assert on the basis of the American National Health Interview Survey that one quarter of all American men are currently dieting to lose weight. It is, however, exercise, that is generally constructed as the most popular strategy amongst men for body management. On the basis of a survey of 78

male high school students, Gibbons *et al.* (1995) propose that the most common weight loss behaviour amongst adolescent boys was exercise. Similarly, Craig and Truswell (1990) argue on the basis of a study of 21 newly married men attempting to lose weight, 14 used exercise to do so.

#### 4.2 Body weight and health

As I have considered, body size and shape has been constructed as a site of concern for both men and women. While generally it is women who are characterised as experiencing a problematic relationship to body, an increasing number of studies are constructing body shape and size as of concern to men (e.g. Eggar and Mowbray, 1993). One of the reasons that has been formulated for this state of affairs is the growing media emphasis on the male body. However, an additional factor that has been constructed as of relevance to both men and women is that of health.

Many knowledges of food have produced understandings regarding the links between obesity and disease. For example, it has been argued that obesity may be associated with cardiovascular disease, diabetes, orthopaedic and pulmonary problems, digestive difficulties, insomnia, specific forms of cancer and psychological distress (Robison *et al.*, 1993). In Scotland, over a third of both men and women have been categorised as overweight (and thus obese) and are therefore characterised as at risk from such health problems (Scottish Office, 1993).

The links that have been established between obesity and various medical conditions has led the medical profession to promote an awareness of issues of weight as important. Medically, obesity is “defined on the basis of the body mass index (BMI) as less than 25 kg/m<sup>2</sup>” (Scottish Office, 1993, p.17). This definition is based upon physical weight being related to measures of height (i.e. a weight/height ratio). For those with a BMI that is in excess of recommended levels for health, weight-loss is promoted as the desirable course of action. Issues of health and weight-

loss have thus become intertwined. It is thus argued that desire to lose weight has been legitimised by the scientific and medical communities alike (Kerr and Charles, 1986).

Some theorists have called into question the medical construction of weight in this way. Wooley and Wooley (1979) have argued that the health risks associated with obesity have been exaggerated by health and medical professionals. For example, they suggest that the link between obesity and coronary heart disease is weak and supported by little evidence. Additionally, they assert that there is no known cause of, or cure for, weight gain. Consequently, the cultural stigma attached to it is misplaced. Indeed they go so far as to suggest that the cultural pressure on those who are obese to become thin is the cause of many of the health problems often associated being overweight. Chernin (1985), also constructs as problematic the evidence that obesity really is the single cause of the many health problems attributed to it - arguing instead that for women it is cultural pressure to become and remain thin that is the primary basis of such health concerns. As she suggests (*op.cit.*, p.32-3):

The high blood pressure and heart attacks from which our bodies suffer may be the result of the shame we feel about our large bodies and may reflect the social condemnation to which these large bodies open us, rather than the inherent, physical dangers of being fat...our shame so afflicts the body that it endures extreme damage to itself because it has transgressed against a cultural standard which may be highly suspect and problematic in the first place.

There is also a second issue that is constructed of relevance with regards to health and weight. It is argued that the pressure to maintain a 'slim' ideal can lead to unhealthy eating behaviours and disorders such as bulimia and anorexia. These are constructed as more prevalent amongst females than males. Estimates vary, but the ratio is generally formulated to be around 85-95% of all reported cases of eating disorders as female (Andersen, 1995).

### 4.3 Disordered eating

The high prevalence of eating disorders amongst women has attracted a great deal of analytic attention. The threat of such conditions for young women is acute. It is claimed that it is more dangerous and more life threatening to be a student at a single-sex girls school or a fashion model than it is to be a stunt man or a coal miner (Wetherell, 1990).

Feminist theorists have suggested the cause of most cases of eating disorder is women's structural position within Western society. Lawrence (1984) for example, argues that anorexia nervosa has its root in the lack of control women experience over the material circumstances of their lives. She suggests a denial of food is one of the only means through which women can exercise control. As eating disorders such as this are constructed as a result of social positioning, it has been argued that all women living in Western society encounter some problems with food. Many explanations have been produced for this state of affairs.

Orbach (1978), for example, has argued that food is used by women to repress emotional needs and obtain control within a patriarchal and capitalist system that neither values women nor women's 'work'. One consequence of this, she proposes, is that most women encounter another form of disordered eating: compulsive eating. This often results in weight gain. Orbach urges women who are compulsive eaters to learn to eat only on the basis of stomach hunger (physiological hunger) as opposed to reasons or associations that are based upon emotion. In doing this, she suggests, women will break the cycle of eating and dieting replace it with a "more natural and relaxed relationship toward food, and our bodies" (1978, p.127). Such a relationship will allow a body to return to its natural, thin state.

Feminist constructions such as these of disordered eating have been characterised as problematic for two reasons. First, it is argued that they assume a natural or essential body. In relation to the work of Orbach (1978), Diamond (1985, p.55) proposes that:

it does not seem theoretically or practically tenable to suggest that a smaller body size can become any more a woman's body...because 'fat/thin' are defined by social figurations (and not any given nature), this means an 'unmediated' state of thinness becomes an impossibility. It is for this reason that body imagery cannot be freed from social constructions. Social constructions produce the body rather than repressing an essential truth.

This argument proposes that binary definitions of fat/thin are socially constructed. Consequently, they cannot be grounded within any material referent such as a natural body. Diamond argues that any solution to the problems women encounter with body size should not reiterate the dualism of fat/thin, but attempt instead to break down the hierarchical relations which work to privilege thin over fat.

The second problem which has been proposed in connection with feminist formulations of eating disorders is that they fail to explicate the basis for the increasing number of men whose eating behaviour is constructed as disordered in this way (Andersen, 1995). Certainly, Orbach (1978) has argued that different explanations are required in order to account for the problems men may encounter in connection with food. Moreover, it has been argued that the construction of eating disorders as primarily female may result in many of the measures that have been designed to identify them being constructed as relevant only to women. For example, Dunkeld-Turnbull *et al.* (1987) claim that five men who were classified as bulimic on the basis of DSM-III criteria (Strangler and Printz, 1980) may not be identified as such on the basis of various eating disorder questionnaires. The reason for this, they argue, is that such questionnaires contain an obvious female bias - asking questions about the perceived shape of hips and thighs, menstruation etc. As a consequence, Dunkeld-Turnbull *et al.* (1987) argue that prevalence statistics elicited from test instruments derived from and devised for women screening must be treated with caution. They may fail to identify men suffering from disordered eating. Moreover, from a different epistemological orientation, it has been argued that the very construction of female disorders

such as anorexia may create problems in diagnosing men with this condition. As Hepworth suggests (1993, p.185)

At present femininity/ being female appears to constitute a pre-disposing factor to being diagnosed as anorexic whereas being male may well exclude some male patients from the diagnosis of anorexia nervosa. If a male is diagnosed as anorexic it becomes a discursive problem because the dominant explanation of anorexia nervosa links it specifically with an ideology that has developed since the late 19th century.

Consequently, as Hepworth suggests, the construction of anorexia as a female disease may prevent men being diagnosed as suffering from this disorder.

As I have considered, issues of weight, body and eating difficulties have been constructed in a number of different ways by existing knowledges. The most common notion resonated within such knowledges is the problems faced by many women. However, issues such as weight and body image have been formulated as increasingly of relevance to many men. They have also been medicalised as a consequence of the links between health and obesity.

In the analyses that follow, I will consider how men talk about topics that have commonly been constructed as a feature of a problematic relationship to food. Such an analysis will enable a consideration of the discursive actions performed by respondents with regards to such topics to be undertaken. Consequently, the kinds of issues and concerns that are displayed as interactionally relevant may be explicated.

For organisational purposes, I will consider talk about weight and slimming in relation to one another, and then subsequently examine talk about guilt. Before considering talk about guilt, I will briefly examine how this experience has been constructed on the basis of the understandings explicated so far.



#### 4.4 Men's talk about weight

As I have stated, the first topic I consider is a concern about weight. This topic is often constructed as a significant basis of a potentially problematic relationship to food. The extracts I examine in the following analysis are responses to a question asking if the respondents were "concerned about their weight". I asked this question during the final interview subsequent to questions about the consumption of fatty foods.

In the first two extracts of this analysis, I consider how a concern for weight is acknowledged. In these extracts, the speakers acknowledge concern in a manner designed to downplay its significance.

##### Extract 1 - R1IV, pp.19

- |   |    |   |
|---|----|---|
| 1 | I: | are you concerned with your weight                      |
| 2 | R: | (.2) ermm:mm I wasn't until I got back after the summer |
| 3 |    | holidays..  |

##### Extract 2- R5IV, pp.24

- |   |    |   |
|---|----|---|
| 1 | I: | are you concerned with your weight                        |
| 2 | R: | (2)   |
| 3 |    | yes (.) I am now (.4) again just in the last six months.. |

In both these accounts, the respondents formulate their concern about weight as not long-standing. In extract one, the speaker proposes that weight was not a concern until after the summer holidays (line 2). This proposition makes two implicit claims. First, that weight is currently a concern (an inference arising from the phrase "I wasn't until" : line 2). Second, that it is the summer holidays (a period of time common-sensically associated with relaxation and excess) that has resulted in weight becoming a concern. The recency of this concern is

inferentially produced by the speaker's reference to "the" summer holidays (which implies the holidays immediately prior to the interview: line 3).

In extract 2, the recency of a concern about weight is specified by the utterance "yes (.) I am now (.4) again just in the last six months" (line 3). In common with extract 1, this claim characterises his worry about weight as not long-standing. In both accounts this formulation of concern implies that its basis is not chronic (as it is a recent phenomenon) and thus may be temporary. The seriousness and significance of any weight problem, as a basis for concern, is thus implicitly downplayed.

In extracts 3 and 4, in contrast to those considered previously, the respondents deny being concerned about their weight.

Extract 3 R7IV - pp.14

- 1 I: are you concerned with your weight  
2 R: (.) no I've thought about it but I'm not concerned about it..

Extract 4 - R2IV, pp.16

- 1 I: are you concerned about your weight  
2 R: (.) not concerned no (.) conscious of it..

In both extracts, the respondents directly state that they are not concerned about weight. In extract 1 the speaker states "I'm not concerned about it" ( line 2). In extract 2, the respondent similarly asserts "no ( line 2). Both speakers subsequently produce a second claim that acts to formulate weight as a topic worthy of reflection. In extract 2, the respondent suggests he is "conscious" of his weight (line 2). In extract 1 the proposition is made that weight is something that has been thought about (line 2). These assertions identify weight as a topic that has been considered or is monitored. However, by producing this claim immediately

prior or subsequent to rejecting weight as a concern, the speakers stress that their weight is not regarded as problematic (or a reason for worry).

So far in the analysis, I have considered how a concern for weight is downplayed or denied. In the following three extracts, I wish to consider a descriptive strategy which acts to substantiate the latter claim that weight is not a concern: a claim that is produced in each of the following accounts. There are two main features of this strategy that can be observed. The first of these is the production of a reason that would result in a concern about weight.

Extract 5 - R6IV, pp.12

- |   |    |  |
|---|----|--|
| 1 | I: | are you concerned with your weight   |
| 2 | R: | (.) no   |
| 3 | I: | (.6) no  |
| 4 | R: | (.4) not particularly  |
| 5 | I: | (.4) uhhu  |
| 6 | R: | (.6) errrr its just if I feel it goes (.) if it does go too high then I just |
| 7 |    | think (.) although I mean having said that (.4) for four years I've          |
| 8 |    | been at fourteen seven so it's never been too high yet.                      |

Extract 6 - R2IV, pp.16 (continuation of extract 4)

- |   |    |  |
|---|----|--|
| 1 | I: | are you concerned about your weight                                      |
| 2 | R: | (.) not concerned no (.) conscious of it (1) I'd be concerned if I       |
| 3 |    | shot right up (1) but the- (.) I mean I lead a fairly active life as you |
| 4 |    | know..   |

Extract 7 - R5IV, pp.11

- |   |    |   |
|---|----|---|
| 1 | I: | are concerned about your weight                                     |
| 2 | R: | (.) naaa (1) I seem to just stick                                   |
| 3 | I: | (.8) really   |
| 4 | R: | (.6) I don't rea- (.) I mean I've (.) I just seem to hover now (.2) |
| 6 |    | never really go up or down just seem to stick (.) so I never really |
| 7 |    | bother about weight as such.  |

Each of these speakers produces a different reason for weight becoming a concern. In extract 5, the respondent proposes that his weight could be characterised as problematic if it exceeds a certain level ("if it does go too high": line 6) However, the vague formulation employed in this utterance ('too high') does not specify the level at which weight would become

problematic (i.e. subject to concern). Such vagueness enables the speaker to produce this assertion in a manner that minimises potential contention. No specific, and thus debatable, claims regarding the precise level at which weight becomes problematic are provided. A similar vagueness is employed by the respondent in extract 6. However, in this extract, a different formulation of weight as a concern is produced. On lines 2 to 3 the speaker states "I'd be concerned if I shot right up". This assertion proposes that rapid and substantial weight gain would be perceived as problematic. Yet again, however, the precise levels involved (e.g. the exact amount of weight gained etc.) are not specified to minimise the contentious basis of this assertion.

In extract 7 the respondent formulates a potential reason to be worried about his weight in a more implicit manner than in the previous two extracts. In this extract, a concern is formulated in terms of weight becoming unstable. This claim is produced conversely: as the speaker suggests that his weight cannot be characterised in this manner (as unstable). On lines 5 to 6 he states "I just seem to hover now (.2) never seem to go up or down just seem to stick". As a consequence, he states, "so I never really bother about weight as such" (lines 6-7).

This subsequent utterance characterises his weight's stability as the reason for his lack of concern. Implicitly, therefore, weight becoming unstable and going up or down is formulated as a potential basis for concern.

In extract 7 two actions are performed. The first of these, in common with extracts 5 and 6, is the formulation of a reason for becoming concerned about weight. The second action is the rejection of this reason as purely hypothetical, and thus not relevant. A concern about weight is therefore rejected. This subsequent action is the second element of the descriptive strategy employed to similar effect by all three speakers. It can thus be observed in extracts 5 and 6.

In extract 6 the respondent implies that his weight is unlikely to increase rapidly and substantially (i.e. shoot right up - the reason he produced for concern) by stating “I mean I lead a fairly active life as you know” (lines 3-4). This claim tacitly employs the supposition that weight gain is a result of too little activity. By characterising his lifestyle as fairly active, the likelihood of a rapid and substantial increase in weight is minimised, and the relevance of this reason for concern rejected. In extract 6 the respondent denies that his weight could be characterised as “too high” (line 6) by suggesting “for four years it’s been at fourteen seven so it’s never been too high yet” (lines 7-8). This claim implies that weight becoming a concern (in the speaker’s terms of ‘too high’) is unlikely: due to the length of time it has remained stable at a non-problematic level.

In the previous three extracts I have considered a descriptive strategy designed to warrant the claim that weight is not a worry. This strategy has involved the production of a potential reason for concern with weight, and the denial that this reason is relevant. In the following account, the speaker similarly states that he is not concerned about his weight. However, in contrast to these previous extracts, as the account unfolds he subsequently produces a justification as to why weight is something he has thought about (a claim produced on line 2). In this extract, therefore, reflecting upon weight is treated as an accountable issue.

Extract 8 - R7IV, pp.14 (continuation of extract 3)

- |   |    |  |
|---|----|--|
| 1 | I: | are you concerned with your weight                                     |
| 2 | R: | (.) no I've thought about it but I'm not concerned about it (2) but    |
| 3 |    | now (2) as my age says (1) at my age I think I have to (.) eat less in |
| 4 |    | comparison (.) less fatty foods (.4) o::rr foods which can make my     |
| 5 |    | weight go up (.) because I'm not using that much energy (.6) before    |
| 6 |    | I burnt a lot.   |

On lines 2 to 4 the respondent suggests that it is his age that requires him to consider his weight. The reason for this, he suggests, is the comparative difference in energy usage

between now and when he was younger “because I’m not using that much energy (.6) before I burnt a lot” (lines 5-6).

The speaker also produces a description of what action is required as a result of his getting older: “ I have to (.) eat less in comparison (.) less fatty foods (.4) orrrr foods which can make my weight go up” (lines 3-5). In this statement, eating less of specific foods is characterised as the way in which an increase in weight is avoided. This claim works to formulate such an increase as negative: it is a potential state of affairs that requires preventative action.

While this speaker has produced an account acknowledging that weight is an issue worthy of active reflection (and explaining why this is so), he also denies it is a basis for concern. In the next two extracts, by contrast, weight is described as a basis for worrying. Yet in both accounts, the significance of this state of affairs is downplayed. In the following extract, extract 9, the speaker trivialises the reason for his concern in two ways. In the first of these, his weight is described as not problematic.

Extract 9 - R5IV, pp.24 (continuation of extract 2)

- |   |    |  |
|---|----|--|
| 1 | I: | are you concerned with your weight                                     |
| 2 | R: | (2)  |
| 3 |    | yes (.) I am now (.4) again just in the last six months (.8) I mean I  |
| 4 |    | don't think my weight's a problem cos I'm not (.) overly heavy for     |
| 5 |    | (.) my height (.2) it's just kind of (.) in the wrong place ha ha (.4) |
| 6 |    | it's just rou- (.) round the middle I'm (.2) too fat round the middle  |
| 7 |    | (.4) although I wouldn't say I was too heavy (.) for my size.          |

On lines 5 to 7 the respondent states that he is too fat round the middle. The speaker produces this claim subsequent to an assertion that weight is not a problem (“ I don’t think my weight’s a problem cos I’m not (.) overly heavy for my height”: lines 3-4). This assertion downplays the significance of being too fat round the middle by suggesting that it is not a “problem”: in contrast to what is implicitly characterised as such (weight exceeding what is normal for a

particular height). Indeed, the speaker produces a second denial of this potential state of affairs to substantiate his claim (“I wouldn’t say I was (.) too heavy for my size”: line 7).

The second way in which the speaker trivialises the reason for his concern about weight is manifest within the description of it he provides. By suggesting that he is concerned as a consequence of becoming “too fat round the middle” (line 6), he formulates a very specific and localised (i.e. round the middle) reason for such anxiety. The specificity of this claim implicitly minimises its seriousness, as weight gain is not formulated as a general problem (which common-sense suggests may have a more significant effect).

In the final extract, the respondent similarly describes a reason for a concern with weight in a manner designed to downplay its significance.

Extract 10 - R1IV, pp.19

- |    |    |  |
|----|----|--|
| 1  | I: | are you concerned with your weight   |
| 2  | R: | (.2) ermm:mm I wasn't until I got back after the summer                    |
| 3  |    | holidays ]   |
| 4  | I: | [ha ha   |
| 5  | R: | ha ha ermm:mm (.4) no I::I (.) when I was twenty two up till I was         |
| 6  |    | thirty five I was eleven and a half stone (.) and I ate masses I ate       |
| 7  |    | loads (.) I used to play rugby (.) I've always been sporty I think         |
| 8  |    | that's helped (.) but I was always a steady weight (.2) err::r (.) I've    |
| 9  |    | started doing weights at school and (.2) my weights gone up but (.)        |
| 10 |    | I'm tr::rying to convince myself its cos I've put muscle on (.4) but er    |
| 11 |    | (.) no not (.) I'm not co- (.) I'm not bothered about my weight if         |
| 12 |    | somebody said to me err::r you weigh thirteen stone or fifteen (.)         |
| 13 |    | weight's nothing it doesn't make any difference (.) it's probably (.)      |
| 14 |    | it's vanity with me (.) it's if I look (.) if I looked (.) fat and awesome |
| 15 |    | and I weighed ten stone (.) then I wou::ld try to get rid of it (.) if     |
| 16 |    | was fat and awesome at sixteen stone I would try and get rid of it         |
| 17 |    | (.) it's more to do with looks I think (.4) than (.) than actual weight.   |

On line 9 the respondent states that his weight has increased (“my weight’s gone up”). This is a common-sensical reason for weight becoming a concern - a concern that is initially acknowledged in response to the question (line 2). However, by enmeshing the assertion that weight has gone up within a historical narrative (in which he formulates his weight for the

preceding years as stable), the speaker implicitly minimises the problematic nature of this occurrence.

On lines 5 to 8 he proposes that his weight remained stable (at eleven and a half stones) while he was between the ages of twenty two and thirty five. This was despite his immoderate consumption of food ("I ate masses I ate loads": lines 6-7). On lines 8 to 9 he suggests "I've started doing weights at school and (.2) my weight's gone up". By preceding his claim regarding an increase in weight with the assertion that, at the same time, he started doing weights at school, the speaker implicitly characterises this new activity as the cause of his weight gain. Such a characterisation is warranted by the prior description of his weight remaining stable over time (as the inference arising is that this new activity disturbed the existing state of affairs). By implicitly formulating this cause for his weight gain, the speaker downplays its significance - as it is both recent and a direct consequence of a specific activity.

On line 10 the speaker states directly that his doing weights is the cause of his increase in weight. He does this by invoking the common-sense idea that this activity results in muscle gain: "I'm tr::rying to convince myself it's cos I've put muscle on". Note how this claim is characterised as a desirable explanation, as opposed to a factual assessment through the use of the phrase "tr::rying to convince myself". To construct his claim in this way, the speaker implicitly acknowledges the possible relevance of other explanations for his weight gain. One effect of this is to undermine the previously worked up assertion that his increase in weight is a consequence of his starting weight training. Implicitly, therefore, the potential for it being a more serious problem is acknowledged. Yet following this statement, the speaker modifies his account to deny entirely that weight gain is a basis for concern at all: "no not (.) I'm not con- (.) I'm not bothered about my weight" (line 11). This modification provides the basis for the invocation of a similar descriptive strategy to that I explored in extracts 4 to 7 (which involved the description of a basis for concern that is characterised as not relevant).



On lines 11 to 17 two potential reasons for being concerned about weight are described then rejected. The first of these, on lines 12 to 13, is weight reaching a particular level (thirteen or fifteen stone). By stating “weight’s nothing to me it doesn’t make any difference” after producing this assertion, the speaker explicitly denies that weight, in these terms, is a concern.

On line 14 he suggests, contrastingly, that how he looks is of greater interest, and states this on line 17 by suggesting “ it’s more to do with looks I think (.4) than actual weight”. He develops this proposition by constructing an example that highlights the significance of looks in contrast to physical weight (e.g. “if I looked (.) fat and awesome and I weighed ten stone (.) then I would try to get rid of it” : lines 14-15). However, the relevance of looking fat as reason for concern is denied by its hypothetical characterisation. In his description, the respondent uses terms such as ‘would’ and ‘if’ to assert that he is not presently concerned about his looks. Again, the relevance of such a concern is rejected.

In this analysis I have examined how a concern about weight is talked about by respondents. I wish now to develop this theme by examining accounts pertaining to one of the ways commonly constructed as a means of reducing weight - slimming foods.

#### 4.5 Men’s talk about slimming

In following extracts I will consider responses to questions such as “would you buy food that is advertised as an aid to slimming”. These questions were asked during interview four in connection with an image advertising weightwatcher’s slimming products. The advert juxtaposed a photograph of these products with a number of statements stressing their utility in assisting weight loss.

In the first three extracts of the analysis, I examine how speakers acknowledge that the purchase of slimming foods may be a relevant course of action. In each of these extracts, the speakers

describe a state of affairs that would, or does, invoke measures to manage weight. Take, for example, extract 1:

Extract 1 - R5IV, pp.13

- |   |    |   |
|---|----|---|
| 1 | I: | would you buy (.) food that's advertised as an aid to slimming    |
| 2 | R: | (2)   |
| 3 |    | ermmm:mm (3) six months ago I'd have said no (1) but since I've   |
| 4 |    | ha ha put on a bit of weight around my middle it's (.) ha (.6) it |
| 5 |    | would become (.) more attractive now..                            |

On line 5 the respondent claims that slimming foods “would become (.) more attractive now” . This increase in his propensity to purchase slimming foods is characterised as a result of his recent gain in weight (“I’ve ha ha put on a bit of weight around the middle”: lines 3-4). Moreover, the recency of this state of affairs is accentuated by his initial response to the question (“six months ago I’d have said no”: line 3). Consequently, it is the circumstance of his recent weight gain that is formulated as the basis for his regarding slimming foods as “more attractive”. However note here that by using the vague phrase “more attractive” he doesn’t explicitly state whether or not such foods would be purchased. Consequently, the respondent does not directly answer the question.

In extract 2, by contrast, the speaker produces a direct claim pertaining to the purchase of slimming foods. Yet in common with extract 1, he formulates his propensity to purchase slimming foods as dependent upon particular circumstances.

Extract 2 - R1IV, pp.16

- |   |    |   |
|---|----|---|
| 1 | I: | would you buy food that is advertised as an aid to slimming     |
| 2 | R: | (2)   |
| 3 |    | ermm:mm (1) if I was fat yes (.) yes if I was desperate to lose |
| 4 |    | weight yes I would (.2) er:mmm I would definitely do that..     |

On lines 3 to 4 the respondent describes two states of affairs that would result in his buying slimming foods: “if I was fat” and “if I was desperate to lose weight”. These are characterised

as a definite basis for the purchase of such foods (e.g. “I would definitely do that”: line 4). However, these circumstances are formulated in hypothetical terms (through the phrase “if I was”: line 3): again in contrast to extract 1. As such, the respondent implicitly asserts that slimming foods are not purchased at the present time.

While in extracts 1 and 2 the respondents describe circumstances within which their propensity to buy foods advertised as an aid to slimming is increased, in extract 3, the respondent describes two states of affairs which result in substantive action to manage weight. Although he initially acknowledges that he “probably would” purchase slimming foods (line 2), he does not explicitly formulate this course of action as relevant to either of the circumstances he describes.

#### Extract 3 - R2IV, pp.17

- |    |    |   |
|----|----|---|
| 1  | I: | would you buy food that is advertised as an aid to slimming                 |
| 2  | R: | (1) ermm:mm (3) yes I probably would (1) I'm conscious of                   |
| 3  |    | waistline (.) uhhu (3) I::I err:: (.4) am under six feet (.) five eleven or |
| 4  |    | thereabouts(.4) I vary from twelve four to thirteen stone (1) in that       |
| 5  |    | kind of range (.6) and i::f I'm at the top end I::I er::r go (.) easy on    |
| 6  |    | what I take in (.2) I'm twelve twelve at the moment (.) just under          |
| 7  |    | twelve twelve ermm:mm (.) so (.4) that was a dead loss for me               |
| 8  |    | there (.8) these days I have not been taking erm:mm (1) biscuits            |
| 9  |    | with cups of tea or cups of coffee (.2) never go daft on it (.) out for     |
| 10 |    | dinner on Friday evening and I had second helping and worked                |
| 11 |    | my way through and I'll eat like fury on Saturday again (.2) er but         |
| 12 |    | is just conscious of er::m (.6) if I get above thirteen stone at all I      |
| 13 |    | really (.4) take specific strides to do something about it.                 |

On lines 3 to 5 the respondent produces a detailed quantification of the levels between which his weight fluctuates. He subsequently describes a state of affairs invoking action by saying “i::f I’m at the top end I::I er::r (.) go easy on what I take in” (lines 5-6). By employing the phrase “go easy” in this utterance, the respondent implicitly characterises the actions to manage weight he may take as fairly minimal. This characterisation is articulated more directly in two ways. Firstly, an example is provided of the kind of moderation that may be exercised. On lines 6 to 7 the speaker states that he is presently at the upper end of his weight range and asserts, as a

consequence, “these days I have not been taking ermm::mm (1) biscuits with cups of tea or cups of coffee” (lines 8-9). As such, the kind of action he takes is constructed as a reduction in his intake of a food (biscuits) that is often associated with weight gain, but is also commonsensically considered as an incidental, snack, item (especially when consumed with a hot drink). Moderating his consumption in this manner thus involves only a minimal degree of restraint.

The second way in which the speaker downplays the kind of action he may take when his weight reaches the top end of the range is described on lines 9 to 11. Here, he states, “never go daft on it” and produces two examples of situations in which his consumption of food is accentuated (e.g. “out for dinner on Friday night and I had second helping”: lines 9-10). This lack of inhibition warrants his claim that he doesn’t “go daft” attempting to reducing his weight: a claim that minimises the degree to which his desire to lose weight is a significant feature of his eating practices.

The second state of affairs resulting in weight management practices is formulated by this speaker in more serious terms than the first. On lines 12 to 13 the following assertion is provided: “if I get above thirteen stones at all I really (.4) take specific strides to do something about it”. In contrast to the previous circumstance (where weight is characterised as something of which the speaker is “just conscious of”: line 12), exceeding thirteen stones is classified as provoking significant action to reduce weight. Yet the respondent employs the vague phrase “specific strides” (line 13) to describe the nature of action that may ensue. In common with extract 1, this vagueness does not make reference to the kind of activities that may be invoked. Whether or not this would involve the purchase of slimming foods is consequently not addressed.

In the three extracts I have considered so far, the respondents have described circumstances that invoke measures being taken to manage weight, or increase the propensity for slimming foods to

be purchased. However, it is interesting to note that only one of these speakers claimed directly that these circumstances would certainly involve the purchase of slimming foods (extract 2).

In the following three extracts, I will examine one way in which the respondents downplay the likelihood of their buying slimming products, or warrant the claim that they would not be purchased. In these extracts the speakers all undermine the utility and value of such foods. In the first of these extracts, extract 4, the respondent works up the claim that other forms of dietary management are a more effective means of losing weight than eating slimming foods. He does so by firstly producing example of considerable weight loss being achieved without the use of slimming products.

**Extract 4 - R1IV, pp.16-17 (continuation of extract 2)**

- 5 R: I was actually in the company of the Scottish slimmer of the] year  
6 I: [ yeah  
7 R: at the weekend (.) yeah I actually discovered she's my neighbours  
8 ermm (.) sister in law (.) and she has gone from eighteen stone to  
9 eleven stone (.4) and I saw a photograph of her before oh she was  
10 massive she was absolutely awesome (.2) and she's really slimmed  
11 down to someone quite attractive now (.4) but (.) she didn't use (.)  
12 she didn't use any of the slimfast or weight watchers meals (.) all  
13 she did was alter her diet and I think that's probably moreimportant  
14 (.) rather than buying things like weightwatchers slimfast and that  
15 (.) i::f you change your diet away from something that's got a lot of  
16 fat in it a lot of sugar in it (.) high cholestrol (.) get down to  
17 something that's got less of that in it (.) then you can do just as  
18 well (.) and als- (.) in fact (.4) I'm convinced even better and (.2)  
19 you could probably eat more (.) because you know what's going  
20 into it you can probably eat more..

On lines 5 to 11 the respondent describes meeting the Scottish Slimmer of the Year who, he claims, had slimmed down from eighteen to eleven stone. The weight lost is accentuated by his use of an implicit contrast between her previous appearance as “absolutely awesome” and her current status as “someone quite attractive” (note the extreme terms being used here to stress the contrast, e.g. “awesome”: lines 10-11). The speaker subsequently describes the reason for such a dramatic reduction in weight by suggesting “she didn’t use any of the slimfast or weightwatcher’s meals (.) all she did was alter her diet and I think that’s probably

more important". This utterance undermines the utility of slimming foods by asserting that these are less important than dietary modification.

As the account unfolds, the respondent produces a more specific description of the dietary changes required to effect such a reduction in weight. On lines 15 to 17 he suggests such changes should involve a reduction in the consumption of foods containing high quantities of fat, sugar and cholesterol: and, by contrast, the ingestion of foods containing less of these properties. Note, here, that in constructing this claim, the speaker implicitly formulates the nature of the diet upon which change must be enacted as comprised of high levels of fat, sugar and cholesterol. Such a formulation enables him to accentuate the effectiveness of such change in a robust manner: as common-sensically, the consumption of substances such as fat and sugar may result in weight gain.

On lines 17 to 20 the speaker assesses the effect of these dietary changes and concludes "you can do just as well (.) and als- (.) in fact (.4) I'm convinced even better". This utterance explicitly asserts that slimming foods are a less effective means of weight loss than dietary change. Moreover, this conclusion is given added impetus by the speaker's subsequent claim that more food can be consumed if slimming foods are not a feature of diet: due to the increased level of control over what is actually eaten (lines 19-20).

By undermining their effectiveness, the speaker in extract 4 tacitly minimises the likelihood that slimming foods would be purchased. In extract 5, the speaker warrants his claim that slimming foods are not purchased by similarly undermining their worth. However, in contrast to the previous extract, this action is performed in an implicit manner.

Extract 5- R7IV, pp.14

- |   |    |  |
|---|----|--|
| 1 | I: | would you buy food that's advertised as an aid to slimming         |
| 2 | R: | (.4) noo:oo (1) I buy food which is (.2) for the qual- (.) quality |

3           which    means it will be tasty (.4) it will be fulfilling (.) you filling  
4           what my need is (.6) taste is there and is filling (.4) I'm interested  
5           (.2) and this weight business and all that is (.) is human  
6           metabolism (.4) I've seen people and I've seen myself (.2) I could  
7           drink eig- eight nine beers even in an evening (.2) bottles (.4) and I  
8           could eat tons of rice (.) I mean when I'm saying rice and all that (.)  
9           dish and all that (.4) and still I never put weight on

On lines 5 to 6, the speaker asserts that weight is determined by metabolism (“all this weight business and all that (.) is human metabolism”). Implicitly, this assertion suggests that weight reduction measures (such as the consumption of slimming foods) are thus of little consequence. To warrant his claim, the speaker provides an example of a state of affairs that would, common-sensically, be regarded as provoking weight gain. On lines 7 to 9 he describes his own voluminous consumption of food and drink in terms designed to highlight quantity. For example, he suggests in one evening he could drink eight or nine beers and eat “tons” (line 8) of rice. In despite of this level of consumption, he states “and I still never put weight on” (line 9). This utterance rejects the common-sense supposition that eating and drinking large quantities of substances that may be generally considered as highly calorific (e.g. beer) will result in weight gain. Consequently, the implication arising in connection with this claim is that weight gain is unrelated to consumption - an implication that meshes with the speaker’s prior assertion that weight is determined by metabolism. Indeed, although the example provided is formulated as an anecdotal narrative, its relevance to the more general population is established by the preceding phrase “I’ve seen people and I’ve seen myself” (line 6). This phrase works rhetorically to counter any potential refutations that arise in relation to the tension between the personal example subsequently produced and the global proposition being made about weight (i.e. that it is determined by metabolism).

The claim that weight is defined metabolically acts to undermine the utility of slimming foods. Implicitly, any such dietary intervention is implicitly characterised as ineffectual (and thus unlikely to be engaged by the speaker) - a characterisation that justifies the respondent’s

prior claim that slimming foods would not be purchased. In the following extract, the speaker describes slimming foods as a “gimmick” (line 3): a term often used to signify an item with little inherent value but designed to attract publicity or attention. Implicitly, this characterisation belittles the value of slimming foods.

Extract 6 - R1IV, pp.17

- |   |    |  |
|---|----|--|
| 1 | I: | would you buy food that is advertised as an aid to slimming      |
| 2 | R: | (2)  |
| 3 |    | I dunno (.) I think it's a bit of a gimmick (.4) cos everybody's |
| 4 |    | caught in this]  |
| 5 | I: | [uh hu   |
| 6 | R: | you know..   |

The claim that slimming foods are a “bit of a gimmick” (line 3) is given added impetus by the speaker’s subsequent statement. On lines 3 to 6 he suggests “cos everybody’s caught in this you know”. While this is a vague proposition (as the speaker does not specify what it is everybody is caught in), his use of the term “caught” implicitly suggests the existence of a phenomena which involves people unwittingly (or against their will). Such a phenomenon meshes readily with the notion of a gimmick. Consequently, by characterising slimming foods as an item sold on the basis of such pretences, its inherent worth, and thus utility, is undermined.

In the previous three extracts, I have examined different ways in which the utility of slimming foods is belittled and undermined. The likelihood of such foods being purchased is thus tacitly downplayed, or the claim that they would not be purchased warranted. In the next two extracts, I consider a different form of justification for not buying such foods. In both extracts, the speakers formulate criteria upon which the purchaseability of food is assessed, and reject slimming food on this basis.

Extract 7 - R5IV, pp.14 (continuation of extract 1)

- |   |    |  |
|---|----|--|
| 1 | I: | would you buy (.) food that's advertised as an aid to slimming |
| 2 | R: | (2)  |



ermmm:mm (3) six months ago I'd have said no (1) but since I've  
ha ha put on a bit of weight around my middle it's (.) ha (.6) it  
would become (.) more attractive now (.2) depending what it was  
(.) depends what it is (1) it would still have to taste good and still  
have to (.) fill me up]  
I: (.2) [uh hu  
R: (.6) and if it met these two sort of criteria then I would (.4) but I've  
never seen a slimming thing yet (.) that would do it (.6) and on the  
whole no (.) I wouldn't (.) it would have to be an exceptional dish.

**Extract 8 - R7IV, pp.16 (continuation of extract 5)**

1 I: would you buy food that's advertised as an aid to slimming  
2 R: (.4) noo:oo (1) I buy food which is (.2) for the qual- (.) quality  
3 which means it will be tasty (.4) it will be fulfilling (.) you filling  
4 what my need is (.6) taste is there and is filling..

In extract 8, on lines 2 to 4, the speaker proposes that he buys food on the basis of quality, which he defines as taste (e.g. “it will be tasty”: line 3) and the degree to which it meets his requirement (“filling what my need is”: line 4). These two criteria are similarly produced in extract 8. On lines 6 to 7 the respondent suggests that slimming food would “still have to taste good and still have to (.) fill me up” in order to be purchased.

This speaker subsequently asserts that slimming food generally does not meet these criteria. On lines 9 to 10 he states “but I’ve never seen a slimming thing yet (.) that would do it”. By providing this claim in terms of his own experience (i.e. he has never seen one), its basis is not open to contestation. Moreover, by use of an extreme formulation - “I’ve never seen” - the respondent stresses the likelihood that all slimming foods can be characterised in this way. He thus presents a robust argument that is warranted by his utterance on line 11: “it would have to be an exceptional dish”. Again, the use of an extreme term (“exceptional”) in this utterance characterises slimming foods as generally not acceptable and thus unlikely to be purchased (a conclusion stated prior to this on lines 10-11: “on the whole no (.) I wouldn’t”).

In extract 8, the speaker's assertion that slimming foods do not meet his criteria is a more implicit feature of the account that is produced. By initially responding negatively to a question

asking whether he buys foods advertised as an aid to slimming (“noo::oo”: line 2), and subsequently providing a description of the food selection criteria he does employ, the participant tacitly formulates slimming foods as not acceptable in relation to these. The supposition here is that slimming foods are assessed on such criteria and rejected.

In these two preceding extracts, the respondents have suggested that slimming foods fail to meet the specific criteria of tasting good and being filling. For this reason, their purchase is characterised as unlikely or rejected altogether. In the final two extracts of this analysis, I wish to consider accounts that also reject such foods on the basis of their failure to meet specific criteria. I will first consider extract 9.

Extract 9 - R1IV, pp.16 (continuation of extract 4)

- 21 R: ..if I was desperate yes try it but (.8) I would need to (.) like a  
 22 nutritious (.4) chocolate milk shake first thing in the morning (.) that  
 23 wouldn't last me till midday]  
 24 I: [no::o  
 25 R: I:I'm afraid (.2) it would have to be (.) it would have to full of bran  
 26 that (.) that made me feel full the whole time..

In this extract the speaker suggests that a particular kind of slimming food is inadequate to meet his needs. On lines 21 to 23 he states that a “nutritious chocolate milk shake” (a description which common-sensically could be taken to refer to Slimfast products) would not last him until midday (i.e. lunchtime). A reason for this is implicitly provided on lines 25 to 26: “it would have to be full of bran that (.) that made me feel full the whole time”. This utterance asserts that the milk shake would require additional properties (such as bran - a substance often considered as a bulky food) in order to make it sufficiently filling. The implication arising from this claim is that the milk shake itself is not sufficient to meet the speaker’s requirements. In common with the previous two extracts, the likelihood of such a product being purchased is thus minimised. Indeed, note that a similar assessment criterion to one of those produced in the previous two

extracts (food being substantial enough to satiate needs) is employed by this speaker. By contrast, in the following extract, slimming foods are rejected on a very different basis.

Extract 10 - R3IV, pp.17 (continuation of extract 6)

- 1 I: would you buy food that is advertised as an aid to slimming  
2 R: (2)  
3 I dunno (.) I think it's a bit of a gimmick (.4) cos everybody's  
4 caught in this]  
5 I: [uh hu  
6 R: you know (.6) I think like your (.) like your mueslies and all that  
7 there're good for ya er I wouldn't buy a food that was (.) that would  
8 help you to slim (.) but I would buy something if I thought it was  
9 going to do you good (.) like muesli for roughage (.) stuff like that  
10 (.2) if I thought it was doing your body good]  
11 I: [uh hu  
12 R: (.6) whether it give you (.4) whether your body looked good it  
13 wouldn't bother us so much (.2) bu::t if you knew it was doing your  
14 body good inside you know]  
15 I: [uh hu  
16 then I would (.2) I::I'd go more for that

On lines 8 to 9 the speaker suggests that he would purchase food on the basis of its positive impact on health: "I would buy something if I thought it was going to do you good". This proposition is reiterated on line 10 and also on lines 13 to 16 ("if you knew it was doing your body good inside then I would (.) I::I'd go more for that"). Throughout this extract, a contrast is developed between this reason for purchasing food and an alternative of buying foods to facilitate slimming. This contrast works explicitly to reject the latter as relevant. For example, on lines 7 to 8, prior to the claim that he would purchase foods on the basis of health the speaker states "I wouldn't buy a food that was (.) that would help you to slim". Moreover, on lines 12 to 13 he produces a reason for this in terms of his lesser interest in looking good ("whether your body looked good it wouldn't bother us so much"). This reasoning implicitly formulates the basis of slimming as the desire to look good. Yet, it also acts to deny that a desire to slim is a basis that would motivate the speaker to purchase particular foods - such as foods advertised as an aid to slimming.

## 4.6 Discussion

In this discussion I wish to pick up on some of the main actions performed within these analyses. One of these, as I have considered, is the manner in which the speakers generally deny, or downplay the likelihood of, buying foods advertised as an aid to slimming. In performing this action, they display a sensitivity to negative inferences that may arise in connection with the purchase of such foods. In extracts 1 to 3 all the participants claim that the purchase of slimming foods is a possibility. However, in extracts 1 and 3 the speakers produce this claim in tentative manner. In extract 1, for example, the speaker asserts that slimming foods would become “more attractive” as a consequence of his recent gain in weight. In this statement, he does not directly answer the question (which asked if he would buy foods advertised as an aid to slimming), noting instead only an increase in his propensity to purchase them.

A similarly tentative response is provided in extract 3. In this extract the speaker asserts that he *probably* would buy slimming foods, before subsequently describing two circumstances that result in weight management practices being undertaken (neither of which are explicitly formulated as the consumption of slimming foods). In producing an indirect and tentative reply to the question, both speakers seem to orientate toward the particular suppositions that may arise from a direct claim that slimming food would be purchased.

A sensitivity to possible inferences which may arise from the purchase of slimming foods is also displayed as relevant in extracts 4 to 6. In these extracts the speakers produce accounts designed to undermine the utility and value of such foods. In doing so they downplay the likelihood of slimming food being purchased (extracts 4 and 6), or warrant the claim that they would not buy it (extract 5). However, the reasoning provided by the respondents to perform this action is interesting as it constructs slimming foods, or attempts to lose weight in general, as illegitimate and ineffectual.

In extract 6, for example, the speaker asserts that slimming foods are a “bit of a gimmick”. This claim works to formulate such foods as of little inherent value. Similarly, in extract 4 the speaker claims that buying foods designed to aid slimming are a less effective means of losing weight than dietary change. Again, this proposition works to undermine the inherent worth of slimming foods, as their relative effectiveness is downplayed. Finally, in extract 5, the speaker tacitly proposes that these foods are of little consequence for the reduction in weight, as this is determined metabolically.

By constructing slimming foods in this way the speakers downplay the likelihood that they will be purchased and thus consumed. Common-sense suggests foods will not be bought on *illegitimate* grounds (i.e. that they aid slimming and are thus of worth). The reason for this may relate to a number of common sense understandings.

One of these may be the notion that managing food intake is a mechanism for losing weight. This notion may be problematic bearing in mind the potential argument that weight is not determined by the consumption of food, but by other factors. In extract 5, the speaker produces a claim asserting that weight is determined metabolically. This claim resonates with knowledges that construct metabolic rate is an important determinant of energy expenditure and thus body-weight.

A second reason for undermining the utility and worth of slimming foods may relate to their construction as a “gimmick”. The contention that slimming foods are a gimmick (extract 6) implicitly meshes with knowledge stressing the mercantile basis of such products. Knowledge such as this formulates slimming as an industry (e.g. Ogden, 1992) which contrives products on the basis of the common desire, it also promotes, to lose weight - a construction that resonates with the speaker’s subsequent claim that slimming foods are sold on a basis that everybody is “caught” in. Moreover, in extract 4, the respondent develops a

case proposing that slimming foods are a less effective means of weight loss than change in diet. One reason for this he produces is that the properties of what is eaten are more fully controlled if slimming foods aren't purchased. Again, this construction formulates these foods as problematic - and thus a basis for their not being purchased.

While the legitimacy of slimming foods was orientated toward by respondents in these extracts, the effect of the accounts produced served to downplay the likelihood of such foods being purchased or warrant the claim that they are not bought. In extracts 7 to 9 the speakers perform a similar action. However, it is the inherent qualities of the food itself that are constructed as problematic. In these extracts the respondents assert that slimming foods do not meet the criteria they require for a food to be consumed. The criteria upon which they base this assessment are foods being tasty and sufficiently filling (or filling enough to last from meal to meal: extract 9). For example, in extract 7, the speaker asserts that slimming products would have to "taste good" and "fill me up". However, on the basis of the proposition that he has never encountered a slimming product that fulfills these criteria, the respondent asserts that he is unlikely to buy them. A similar assertion is produced directly in extract 8, and more implicitly in extract 9.

In extract 11 the speaker produces a different basis for not purchasing slimming foods. In this extract he asserts that food would not be bought on the basis of a desire to "look good", but instead upon its health giving properties. Consequently, this respondent constructs slimming foods as primarily designed to aid aesthetic desires for slimness, and rejects this motivation as relevant to him. In doing so he downplays the significance of his weight as an object of concern.

A similar action is performed by a number of respondents in their talk about a concern with weight. One reason for this may be that such a concern would suggest that weight is problematic. Certainly, speakers do display a sensitivity to this potential supposition. For

example, in extracts 1 and 2 of my analysis considering men's talk about weight, the speakers formulate their concern about weight as not long-standing (and thus temporary - hence downplaying its significance). In doing so they display a sensitivity to possible suppositions that their acknowledged concern may suggest weight is problematic. Similarly in extracts 9 and 10 the respondents assert that their weight is a concern but minimise its problematic nature. In extract 9, for example, the speaker suggests that he has put on some weight "round the middle" and that this is a basis for worry. However, he also stresses that his weight is not problematic in a number of ways: such as that he is not too *heavy* for his size.

The potentially problematic nature of weight is also orientated toward in extracts 5 to 7 where respondents employ a descriptive strategy with two parts to reject this state of affairs. The first part is the formulation of a potential basis for a concern about weight. In each of these extracts this basis is formulated as weight becoming problematic by either increasing or becoming unstable (going up or down). For example, in extract 6 the speaker asserts that he would be concerned if his weight "shot right up". In the second part of the strategy, the speakers deny that this potential basis for concern is relevant (e.g. "I lead a fairly active life: extract 6). Consequently, they deny that their weight is problematic - thus warrant the claim that they are not concerned about it.

By orientating toward and rejecting the supposition that weight may be problematic, the speakers display a sensitivity to possible negative inferences that may arise in connection with this potential state of affairs. One reason for such inferences may relate to the common-sensical construction of body weight as related to individual practices such as food intake and level of exercise. This construction is manifest within many knowledges and forms the basis of common weight management programs such as diets and exercise regimes (McKie and Gregory, 1992). As such, a weight "problem" such as obesity may be formulated as the basis of negative inferences regarding self: such as a lack of self-control or discipline (Ogden, 1992).

While notions of self were not explicitly made relevant within these extracts, it is interesting to note that constructions regarding the practical determinants of weight were produced by respondents throughout the extracts. In his talk about slimming, for example, the speaker in extract 4 proposes that an effective form of weight loss is the reduction in the consumption of foods containing a lot of “fat, sugar and high cholesterol”. Implicitly, this proposition characterises such foods as a significant factor in determining weight. Similarly, in talk about a concern with weight, the respondent in extract 8 asserts that he must eat less “fatty foods” which may result in weight gain as a consequence of his expending less energy due to age. Again, this assertion implicitly formulates the consumption of fatty foods as a potential basis for an increase in weight.

The foods constructed by the speakers as significant in relation to weight are those common-sensically regarded as potentially problematic. Such common-sensical understandings resonate with those produced by knowledges of food. The consumption of fatty foods, for example, is constructed by health and nutritional knowledges as a significant cause of obesity and a factor in conditions such as coronary heart disease (e.g. Scottish Office, 1993). Such knowledges also formulate activity (e.g. exercise) as an important factor in maintaining a low weight - an understanding that may have become common-sensical due to media promulgation and health promotion campaigns. Certainly, this resource is displayed as relevant by the speaker in extract 6 (talk about weight). In this extract the speaker downplays the likelihood of a sudden and rapid increase in weight by suggesting that he leads a “fairly active life”. Moreover, in extract 10 (of the same analysis) the respondent similarly asserts that his sportiness and rugby-playing assisted him in maintaining a steady weight between the ages of twenty two to the age of thirty five.

While both the consumption of particular foods and level of activity are constructed as factors relevant to weight, other formulations of the basis of weight gain are produced in the



extracts. These highlight the complex and contradictory resources that are culturally available in relation to this notion. For example, as I have already considered, when talking about slimming food the respondent in extract 5 asserts that weight is determined metabolically. Contrastingly, in extract 10 (of talk about weight), the respondent produces an explanation for his increase in weight in terms of his greater muscle bulk developed as a consequence of his starting doing weight training at work.

As I have considered, one of the key actions performed by men when talking about weight is the rejection of any suppositions that weight is problematic. However, a second interesting feature of these analyses is the respondent's orientation to inferences that they may not consider weight as of relevance. Such inferences are displayed as relevant in a number of the extracts.

In the first analysis (talk about weight), the respondents in extracts 3 and 4 reject the notion of concern but acknowledge that weight is something that they are "conscious" of (extract 4) or have "thought about" (extract 3). In doing so they display a sensitivity toward, and reject, the supposition that weight may be ignored - a supposition that may arise from the claim that that are not concerned. Similarly, in response to a repetition of it by the interviewer, the respondent in extract 5 (of the same analysis) modifies the claim that he is not concerned about his weight to one that asserts that he is "not particularly" concerned. In modifying his claim in this way, the speaker seems to orientate toward possible problematic inferences arising in connection with his more direct prior response - inferences that may also form the basis of interviewer's repetition of this proposition. Moreover, in this extract, the speaker subsequently describes a potential basis for his weight becoming a concern ('if it does go too high'). While this basis is rejected, as I have already considered, by describing a state of affairs that would result in concern with his weight, the speaker characterises weight as something of which he is aware. A similar action is performed in extracts 6 and 7 - where the speakers formulate a *potential* basis for concern about weight - to similar effect.

By tacitly asserting that weight is a consideration, the speakers orientate toward and reject any inferences to the contrary. These inferences seem to arise in connection with the claim that weight is not a concern - a claim that may suggest a lack of interest. Such a lack of interest could be problematic, for example, as a result of the common construction of weight as linked to various health conditions (e.g. Robison *et al.*, 1993). In other words, a lack of interest in weight may seem foolhardy as a consequence of its association with health. Moreover, the increasing cultural emphasis on men to engage with issues of body that has been constructed by academic knowledges (e.g. Connell, 1995), may also constitute a common sense resource. Consequently, there may be a tacit expectation that body-image and weight will be a consideration - an expectation that could be undermined by the claim that weight is not a concern.

A final point to note here are the variable formulations of a basis for concern about weight, or a weight problem, that are produced throughout the analyses. These include weight exceeding an unspecified level and going "too high" (extract 5 - talk about weight), weight exceeding a specified level or reaching the upper limits of an acceptable range (extract 3 - talk about slimming), weight increasing rapidly and substantially ("shot right up", extract 6 - talk about weight), weight becoming unstable and going up or down (extract 7 - talk about weight), weight exceeding acceptable heaviness for height (extract 9, talk about weight), and looking "fat and awesome" (extract 10, talk about weight). These different constructions of weight becoming problematic highlight the complex and contradictory meanings culturally available with regards to weight. Such complexity is not, however, resonated within existing knowledges of food - which tend to formulate the basis of a problem or concern with weight in more general terms. For example, Egger and Mowbray (1993), propose that many male respondents in their focus groups were concerned about being "overweight" in general, but do not explicate in detail the ways in which the nature and basis of his concern were constructed by participants. Consequently, knowledges claiming to examine men's

relationship to body may fail to capture the variability of constructions that may be culturally available.

#### 4.7 Conclusion

In these analyses the respondents deny buying slimming foods. In doing so they construct slimming foods as either illegitimate, or lacking in taste and substance. In talking about weight, the respondents display a sensitivity to negative inferences arising in connection with inferences that weight is problematic - a potential state of affairs that is rejected. I have proposed that one reason for this may be the common-sense construction of weight as determined by practice - a construction that is produced in a number of these extracts. In contrast to this, speakers also design their accounts to stress that their weight is something of which they are aware. Finally, I have highlighted the variable constructions of a potential problem with weight that are produced and suggested that this illustrates the complexity of the resources culturally available in relation to this topic.

In the next analysis I extend the theme of issues which may be considered as problematic by examining men's talk about guilt. Before examining the extracts, I will briefly consider how this notion has been constructed by existing knowledges of food.

#### 4.8 Guilt

Guilt is commonly constructed by academic theorists as a significant feature of women's experiences to food. Such understandings construct guilt as arising in connection with the consumption of foods that may undermine the desire to maintain a slim body (e.g. Hughes, 1990). For example, Kerr and Charles (1986) report that guilt was a significant feature of their female respondent's experiences with food. It was certain foods that particularly resulted in such feelings - foods that are commonly constructed as pleasurable and eaten outwith meals (e.g. sweets) or those that are highly calorific (e.g. chips): both of which are commonly constructed as detrimental to the maintenance of a slim body.

While guilt and anxiety are constructed as common experiences for women as a consequence of their often problematic relationship to food (e.g. Lawrence, 1984), their relevance to men has not been addressed directly by previous research. However, academic knowledges have proposed that men are subject to increasing bodily regulation via media images (e.g. Mishkind, *et al.*, 1986) and consequently express dissatisfaction, in increasing numbers, with body size and shape (O'Dea, 1995). This construction may implicitly formulate feelings of guilt as of relevance - as it is dissatisfaction with the body which is often cited as the basis of much anxiety experienced by women in relation to food (e.g. Thorogood and Coulter, 1992). Moreover, the links between health and food has also been constructed as a basis for feelings of guilt. For example, McKie *et al.* 1993, argue on the basis of an empirical study of the dietary beliefs and practices of 72 women in the North East of England, that a failure to eat healthily was often perceived as problematic and thus formed the basis of anxiety and guilt. Such a construction of the basis of guilt may also be a resource available to men.

#### 4.9 Men's talk about guilt

In this analysis I examine responses to a question asking if respondents ever feel guilty about eating any foods. This question was asked in the fourth interview, subsequent to talk about an advertising image for chocolate. This image was juxtaposed with a statement constructing chocolate as a treat that is often eaten in secret. Before asking questions about their experiences of guilt, I asked respondents whether they consumed any foods in secret, or if there were any aspects of their diet of which they were ashamed.

In the first three extracts of the analysis, I wish to examine how respondents deny they feel guilty after eating food. In each of these accounts, the speakers produce a direct denial in emphatic terms.

##### Extract 1 - R6IV, pp.13

- |   |    |  |
|---|----|--|
| 1 | I: | have you ever felt guilty about eating any foods at all              |
| 2 | R: | (3) no   |
| 3 | I: | (1) no   |
| 4 | R: | (1) no:::o as I say if I want something I'll have it (.4) there's no |
| 5 |    | guilt.   |

##### Extract 2 - R5IV, pp.12

- |   |    |   |
|---|----|---|
| 1 | I: | do you ever feel guilty about eating any foods              |
| 2 | R: | (.4) nope (1) no (2) not at all (1) I mean I suppose if I.. |

##### Extract 3 - R7IV, pp.13

- |   |    |  |
|---|----|--|
| 1 | I: | do you ever feel guilty about eating any foods |
| 2 | R: | (5) I've never felt guilty..                   |

In extracts 2 and 3 the respondents emphasise that they do not feel guilty in different ways. In extract 2, the speaker produces three terms in succession, each of which directly rejects the relevance of guilt ("nope (1) no (2) not at all": line 2). In extract 3, the statement "I've never felt guilty" is provided. The use of the extreme term "never" stresses the claim that guilt is not experienced.

In extract 1, the respondent similarly denies feeling guilty. However, after producing a direct and negative response to the question (“no”: line 1), the interviewer repeats this denial as a request for elaboration or confirmation. The speaker subsequently re-affirms his claim by stating “if I want something I’ll have it (.4) there’s no guilt” (lines 4 to 5). This affirmation accentuates his denial of guilt by suggesting his eating practices are not affected by such feelings.

In these previous extracts, the relevance of guilt is rejected in a direct and emphatic manner. In the following three extracts, by contrast, I wish to examine how a denial of guilt is produced or substantiated by the admission of other feelings. Moreover, these feelings are characterised as both occasional and circumstantial (and thus not regular, day to day, experiences) with the effect of downplaying their significance. Take, for instance, extract 4:

Extract 4 - R7IV, pp.13 (continuation of extract 3)

- |   |    |  |
|---|----|--|
| 1 | I: | do you ever feel guilty about eating any foods                   |
| 2 | R: | (5) I've never felt guilty (.8) I might feel that sometimes I've |
| 3 |    | (.4) overdone it maybe sometimes because it's so nice..          |

On lines 2 to 3 the speaker acknowledges that he occasionally feels he may have eaten to excess (“I might feel that sometimes I’ve overdone it”). By providing this admission after denying feeling guilty, this reaction is characterised as not guilt. Indeed, the phrase “overdone it” is simply a description of a particular state of affairs (overeating), rather than an assessment of it (e.g. in terms of feeling concerned, anxious, guilty etc.). This discrepancy accentuates the difference between what the speaker experiences, and a guilty reaction.

The speaker asserts that that he has overdone it in a manner designed to downplay the general relevance of this reaction. It is characterised as occasional (it arises “sometimes”: lines 2 and 3) and relevant only to situations where the food has been particularly enjoyable

("because it's so nice"). The frequency of his experiencing such a feeling is thus implicitly minimised (as common-sense suggests that such situations arise only occasionally). Moreover, this minimisation is given added impetus by the assertion that he only may feel this way ("I might feel": line 2, "maybe sometimes": line 3) in such circumstances.

In the following extract, the speaker similarly suggests that he experiences a reaction to overeating in a manner accentuating its circumstantial and occasional basis. Yet in this extract, such a feeling is initially characterised as guilt.

Extract 5 - R2IV, pp.11

- |   |    |  |
|---|----|--|
| 1 | I: | do you ever feel guilty about eating any foods                         |
| 2 | R: | (1) ermm:mm (2) I (.) on occasion (.) feel guilty at overeating (1) if |
| 3 |    | there's a situation where one really gorges oneself ermm (.2) I don't  |
| 4 |    | know if guilty's the right expression I'd afterwards say that that was |
| 5 |    | pretty stupid (.2) one helping would be quite sufficient..             |

On line 2 the respondent acknowledges feeling guilty after eating too much ("on occasion (.) feel guilty at overeating"). On lines 3 to 5, however, he modifies this claim by first asserting "I don't know if guilty's the right expression", and subsequently producing a different description of his reaction: "I'd afterwards say that was pretty stupid". This first utterance rejects the term guilt as a legitimate means of describing his response to overeating. By subsequently producing a second description (overeating is pretty stupid) the speaker infers that this provides a more accurate articulation of his experience. The production of this second description, therefore, implicitly characterises *guilt* as not relevant.

In common with the previous extract, on line 2 the respondent describes his reaction to overeating as occasional ("on occasion (.) feel guilty at overeating). Again, this claim minimises the regularity of such a feeling and downplays its significance. Moreover, by accentuating the degree to which food is consumed on such an occasion by use of the phrase

“really gorges” (“if there’s a situation where one really gorges oneself”: lines 2-3), the speaker formulates his regret as arising on the basis of considerable excess. Inferentially, this downplays the likelihood of such a reaction occurring generally as, again, common-sense would suggest that eating to such an extreme is not a regular occurrence.

In extract 6, the speaker similarly accentuates the basis of a situation which, in this instance, provokes anxiety. On line 3 he employs the phrase “something really bad for me” to describe the nature of a food that, when consumed, will make him feel anxious. By stressing that this food is “really bad”, in common with extract 5, the speaker asserts that anxiety arises in excessive circumstances. This again downplays the likelihood of it arising regularly: a warrant for his prior claim that he feels anxiety only “sometimes” (line 2).

Extract 6 - R8IV, pp.24

|   |    |   |
|---|----|---|
| 1 | I: | do you ever feel guilty about eating (.2) foods                     |
| 2 | R: | (.6) not really you know (.) sometimes the odd twinge of anxiety if |
| 3 |    | I'm eating something really bad for me..                            |

Moreover, the nature of the anxiety that arises in this circumstance is formulated, on line 2, as “the odd twinge”. This formulation minimises its significance as it implies a negligible effect. It is also produced subsequent to a denial of feelings of guilt (“not really you know: line 2). The occasional feeling (or “twinge”) of anxiety is thus characterised as different to guilt.

So far in the analysis, I have examined some ways in which a denial of guilt is produced or substantiated through the admission of other feelings. Additionally, I have also proposed that the regularity of such feelings is minimised and thus their significance and severity downplayed. In the next three extracts I wish to consider a particular descriptive strategy that is employed by respondents to warrant the claim that guilt itself is not experienced. This strategy involves a potential basis for such feelings being described, but characterised as not relevant. In the following extract, for instance, the speaker suggests that he would feel guilty if he ate large quantities of chocolate bars.



Extract 7 - R5IV, pp.10 (continuation of extract 2)

- 1 I: do you ever feel guilty about eating any foods  
2 R: (.4) nope (1) no (2) not at all (1) I mean I suppose if I ate (.) loads  
3 of chocolate bars I would feel quite guilty but I wouldn't eat that  
4 many cos (.) I like the taste but wouldn't eat (.) a lot of them no (.2)  
5 there's nothing (.) nothing I would feel guilty about..

On lines 2 to 3 the speaker states “I suppose if I ate (.) loads of chocolate bars I would feel quite guilty”. By employing the term “loads” in this utterance, he formulates the amount of chocolate bars potentially eaten as immoderate. This, he suggests, would lead to feelings of guilt (although he downplays the severity of such feelings by suggesting he would only feel “quite guilty”: line 3). On lines 3 to 4 the respondent denies that his consumption of chocolate bars would reach such immoderate proportions: “I wouldn’t eat that many” - a denial he re-states on line 4 subsequent to suggesting that he does enjoy the taste of them (“I like the taste but wouldn’t eat (.) a lot of them no”). By stating that he does not eat a lot of chocolate bars, the speaker implies that he does not experience guilt (eating loads of chocolate bars is the only circumstance described by the speaker as a potential basis for guilt). This is stated directly on line 5: “there’s nothing (.) nothing I would feel guilty about”.

In extract 8 the speaker also produces a potential basis for feeling guilty. In this extract, the speaker denies that this basis is relevant to him in a more implicit manner than in the previous extract. On line 3 he states that he has “never” felt guilty, before admitting other feelings. In subsequently characterising a basis specifically for *guilt* (lines 4-19), the implication arising from this in relation to his prior rejection of ever feeling guilty is that such a basis is not relevant to the speaker.

Extract 8 - R7IV, pp.13 (continuation of extract 3)

- 1 I: do you ever feel guilty about eating any foods  
2 R: (5)  
3 I've never felt guilty (.8) I might feel that sometimes I've (.4)  
4 overdone it maybe sometimes because it's so nice (.2) you only can  
5 feel guilty if it (.4) if you are doing something wrong to your (1)

6 health because you're restricted (.2) say for example you're doctor  
 7 has told you you're not supposed to overeat (.6) your family  
 8 knows about it and then you eat (.) on side (.) without anybody  
 9 knowing about it you're bound to feel guilty about it (1) but you  
 10 have no guilt because you (.) nothing about because there's nothing  
 11 proven fact that certain thing is putting your weight on]  
 12 I: [mmm  
 13 R: and you're putting weight (.8) guilt is only there if you're doing  
 14 something in excess and you know it's wrong for you (.6) if you  
 15 know that you're only eating a limited amount  
 16 I: (.) right  
 17 R: (2)  
 18 you won't feel guilty (.8) guilt is only there if you know you're  
 19 knowingly are doing something wrong.

On lines 4 to 6 the speaker suggests “you can only feel guilty if it (.4) if you are doing something wrong to your (1) health because you're restricted”. He produces an example which proposes that guilt arises from the awareness of eating foods in a manner that is “wrong” (e.g. in secret, and against the advice of a doctor: lines 6-9). The implication of these claims is that guilt has a moral dimension: it occurs, for example, in contexts where medical instructions are contravened. This implication is articulated more directly on lines 18 to 19: “guilt is only there if you know you're knowingly doing something wrong”. Guilt is thus formulated as a reaction to a specific kind of behaviour - a behaviour undertaken in contravention of what is understood to be the proper course of action.

In extract 9 two reasons for feeling guilty (that are different to those produced in extracts 7 and 8) are described by the speaker. In common with these prior extracts, however, the relevance of these reasons is denied.

Extract 9 - R8IV, pp. 24 (continuation of extract 7)

4 R: ..I've seen- (.) you sometimes see adverts which are sort of  
 5 suggesting that women should be really guilty after eating  
 6 chocolate (.) and therefore they should buy such and such a kind  
 7 of chocolate which is better for them]  
 8 I: [yeah  
 9 R: there is a particular advert but I've forgotten what it was (.) and as  
 10 far as I can remember this chocolate really failed (.) the whole idea  
 11 was like (.) ooohhh it's so naughty to eat chocolate but it's  
 12 kinda nice as well (.2) and I just think well (.2) well I mean I'm like  
 13 it's (.) that's just not a way that I would think about it (.6) I mean I

14 hav- I enjoy mo::st of the food I eat (.6) even Christmas dinner I  
 15 used to have this thing when I was a bit more of a kid (.) I used to  
 16 feel guilty about eating Christmas dinner not because of the food  
 17 not because of the preparation but because it was ermm:mm (.) it  
 18 was like conscious excess and er (.) now I just think well what the  
 19 hell (.) I can't send it to Ethiopia (.4) so I mean the food is there  
 20 I don't want to waste anything (.) I don't want to throw it away  
 21 an::d (.) I'm not going to have any kind of false guilt about eating  
 22 food (.) cos I like it.

On lines 4 to 7 the speaker states that he has observed adverts suggesting women should experience a significant degree of guilt on the basis of eating chocolate. The consumption of chocolate is thus characterised as one possible basis for guilt. The second potential reason for such feelings is described on lines 15 to 18: the conscious excess of Christmas dinner ("I used to feel guilty about Christmas dinner not because of the food (.) not because of the preparation but because it was ermm::mm (.) it was like conscious excess").

Both these possible bases for guilt are classified as not relevant by the speaker. I will consider firstly how this action is performed in relation to the possibility of guilt arising from the consumption of chocolate.

On lines 4 to 5 the speaker asserts that he has seen adverts which propose that women should feel guilty after eating chocolate. The implication here is that the guilt suggested by such adverts is relevant only to women: an implication given added impetus by the speaker's subsequent description of a second claim being made in the same message ("they should buy such and such a kind of chocolate which is better for them": line 6-7). By employing terms such as "they" and "them" in this utterance, the respondent maintains that these adverts are aimed at, and thus relevant to, women. Inferentially, guilt that arises on the basis of eating chocolate is consequently characterised as not relevant to men. Moreover, the speaker states directly that the method of reasoning proposed in an example of such an advert ("ooohhh it's so naughty to eat chocolate but it's kinda nice as well" lines 11-12) is not one he would employ: "that's just not a way I would think about it" (line 13). As the relevance of this

method of reasoning is constructed as invoking guilt, the speaker implicitly rejects experiencing guilt in this way.

The speaker denies the second potential basis for guilt, in contrast to the extracts I have observed so far, by undermining its legitimacy as a reason for feeling guilty in the first place. He does this by producing a series of practical reasons as to why guilt arising from the conscious excess of Christmas dinner is not valid. These reasons are produced subsequent to his claim, on line 15, that he felt guilty for this reason when he was a bit younger: “when I was a bit more of a kid”. On lines 19 to 20 he states “I can’t send it to Ethiopia (.4) so I mean the food is there and I don’t want to waste anything (.) I don’t want to throw it away”. The case the speaker works up in this statement (that the food is available, it cannot be sent overseas and that he doesn’t want it to be wasted) implicitly characterises the consumption of Christmas dinner as the only reasonable option in such circumstances. Consequently, eating Christmas dinner is characterised as an illegitimate basis for feelings of guilt: a characterisation articulated explicitly on lines 21 to 22 (“an::d (.) I’m not going to have any kind of false guilt about eating food (.) cos I like it”). By formulating guilt for this reason as “false” the speaker undermines its validity. Moreover, the general nature this claim (as it refers simply to “food”) serves to warrant the speaker’s prior claim that he does not feel guilty in general - as all guilt in relation to food is characterised as illegitimate.

In the previous three extracts I have considered a descriptive strategy that involves the formulation of a possible reason for feelings of guilt. By denying the relevance of this reason, the speakers warrant the claim (produced in each of these accounts but considered as earlier extracts) that they do not experience guilt. By contrast, in the final extract, the respondent admits to feeling guilty in a particular circumstance.

Extract 10 - R3IV, pp.18

1 I: do you ever feel guilty about eating any foods

2 R: (1) well just the (.) maybe the (1) all the breakfasts(.) that's the only  
3 thing I feel guilty about]  
4 I: [yeah  
5 R: (.6) cos I just know that they're not doing you any good]  
6 I: [uh hu  
7 R: (.4) and sometimes it worries us and I think (.) you know  
8 ermm:mm (.2) you're not getting any younger (.) and that I don't do  
9 as much exercise as I used to do and then eating those breakfasts (.)  
10 I do sometimes think you know.

On line 2 the speaker suggests that his consumption of so many breakfasts (“all the breakfasts”: I presume this to mean fried breakfasts) may provoke feelings of guilt. He states that this is the only activity resulting in such feelings on line 2 to 3 and thus downplays the general relevance of such feelings: “that’s the only thing I feel guilty about”.

On line 5 the respondent describes a reason for feeling guilty about eating such breakfasts: “cos I know they’re not doing you any good”. Yet subsequent to this, he reformulates his reaction to this state of affairs as worry (“and sometimes it worries us”: line 7). The basis of such worry is further described on lines 8 to 10. Two reasons (in addition to the consumption of breakfasts) are produced: his getting older (“not getting any younger”: line 8), and his lack of exercise (“I don’t do as much exercise as I used to”: lines 8 to 9). As reasons such as these may be common-sensically considered, in conjunction with the consumption of fried foods, to increase the risk of a serious health problem, the respondent tacitly identifies such a possibility as the basis for his concern. Note here, however, that he downplays the degree to which he worries about it by preceding this claim with the term “sometimes”: “sometimes it worries us”: line 7”). Moreover, on line 10 the speaker asserts “I do sometimes think you know”. By using the term “think” to describe the nature of his reaction to such factors, the speaker downplays the significance of his concern. This term merely denotes reflection, as opposed to anxiety (such as in the form of worry or guilt).

#### 4.10 Discussion

One of the most significant features of the extracts I have considered is the way which feelings of guilt are generally rejected or downplayed. In extracts 1 to 3, for example, the speakers produce an emphatic and direct response asserting that they do not experience guilt (e.g. in extract 3 the speaker states that he has *never* felt guilty). The emphatic quality of this response implicitly accentuates the degree to which guilt is not relevant. In extracts 7 to 9, the rejection of guilt is substantiated and warranted by use of a particular descriptive strategy involving the formulation and rejection of possible reasons for feeling guilty. For example, in extract 7 the speaker asserts that he may feel quite guilty if he ate an immoderate number of chocolate bars. In subsequently claiming that he wouldn't eat that many, the speaker rejects this potential basis for guilt and thus the relevance of such feelings.

By rejecting feelings of guilt in this way, the speakers perform an action that seems to display a sensitivity to negative inferences that may arise in connection with *guilt*. Such inferences may relate to its common construction as an aspect of a problematic relationship to food (e.g. Lawrence, 1984)

Guilt is also denied by the respondents in extracts 4 to 6. However in these extracts, other feelings, that are characterised as not guilt, are acknowledged. In extract 4, for example, the speaker asserts that he has never felt guilty, but may occasionally feel he has overdone it. Similarly, in extract 6 the speaker denies feelings of guilt ("not really you know") but subsequently admits occasional feelings of anxiety. Interestingly, the manner in which these acknowledgements are produced seems designed to minimise the potential significance of the feelings encountered. The speakers thus seem to display a sensitivity to negative implications that may arise in connection with the admission of any feeling or negative assessment relating to the consumption of food.

In extract 6, for example, the speaker denies feeling guilty but acknowledges experiencing the “odd twinge” of anxiety. This description serves to downplay the severity of his anxious reaction - and thus tacitly minimise its effect. Similarly, in extracts 4 and 5, the speakers reject feelings of guilt - instead formulating their reaction as an un-emotive assessment of a particular state of affairs. For example, in extract 5, the speaker claims that his response to overeating would be to say “that was pretty stupid..one helping would be quite sufficient”. By formulating his response as a *statement*, rather than a feeling (such as guilt), its emotive quality, and thus potentially problematic nature, is implicitly downplayed.

A sensitivity to negative implications arising from the admission of guilt and other feelings may also be displayed by speakers in the reasons they describe for such a reaction. In extracts 4 to 6 the admission of non-guilt feelings are accounted for in a manner designed to minimise their general significance - they arise only in particular circumstances on an occasional basis. Similarly, in extract 10, the speaker asserts that guilt is experienced *only* in relation to the consumption of fried breakfasts - and occurs as a worry only sometimes. Moreover, the nature of the circumstances provoking guilt or other feelings are described in excessive terms (e.g. “really gorges” - extract 5: “so nice” - extract 4). Such extremity again works to downplay the general relevance of such feelings to everyday life - as common sense suggests such situations do not arise on a regular basis. Indeed, by formulating this kind of reaction as only arising in *excessive* circumstances, the likelihood of it being a feature of normal eating is also minimised.

So far in this discussion I have considered the manner in which speakers reject guilt, and downplay the significance of the feelings they do encounter. By downplaying their significance in this way, in common with the rejection of guilt, the speakers implicitly minimise the likelihood of a problematic relationship to food. As I have suggested, one reason for this may be the negative implications for self that may arise in connection with such a relationship.

Although in this analysis the respondents generally reject guilt or downplay the significance of this, or other, feelings, it may also be the case that some of these accounts are designed to demonstrate that negative feelings *are* experienced in particular circumstances. In extract 6, for example, the respondent asserts that he doesn't feel guilty but does occasionally experience anxiety (a similar claim is produced in extract 4). Moreover, the claim that guilt is not experienced seems tentative in design ("not really you know"). Tentativeness such as this and the acknowledgement of feelings other than guilt in these extracts seem to display a sensitivity to potential negative inferences that may arise in connection with the claim that guilt is not experienced. One such inference of relevance here may be that food intake is not regulated or monitored to any degree. This potential state of affairs may seem somewhat foolhardy in relation to the common-sense construction of food as having a number of implications for issues such as weight (e.g. Robison *et al.*, 1993) and health (e.g. Anderson and Hunt, 1992) etc. Consequently, by describing contexts that may be common-sensically formulated as problematic in this respect (i.e. overeating, eating bad foods) and acknowledging these are recognised, the speakers undermine any possible implications of an entirely unregulated or disinterested approach. Moreover, the acknowledgement of feelings of guilt (extract 10, and initially in extract 5) produces a similar effect.

The final point to note in relation to this analysis concerns the different bases for feelings such as guilt which are produced. These draw upon a number of notions that have been constructed as relevant to food - overeating (extracts 4 and 5), health (extract 10) and the consumption particular foods such as chocolate (extract 9, or eating chocolate to excess: extract 7). However, interestingly, other notions were also employed as a potential basis for feeling guilty. In extract 8, for example, the speaker claims that guilt can only arise "if you know you're knowingly are doing something that is wrong". Consequently a moral basis for guilt is formulated - a construction that is also produced by theorists such as Douglas (1980) and James (1990). Contrastingly, in extract 9, the respondent asserts that he previously felt



guilty on the basis of “conscious excess” as a consequence of third world starvation. While this basis of guilt was subsequently undermined by the speaker, it meshes with notions of ethics that thus constitute a potential resource in relation to food. Resources such as ethics and morality are not, however, a general feature of academic constructions of the reasons for *guilt*, which tend to focus on physical concerns such as body and health (e.g. McKie *et al.*, 1993). Consequently, existing knowledges may fail to recognise these as resources that may be displayed as relevant in accounts.

#### 4.11 Conclusion

In this analysis I have observed the different ways in which speakers deny that they experience feelings of guilt - a denial produced by the majority of respondents. Moreover, participants design accounts in a manner that seems sensitive to inferences that may arise from the claim that any negative reaction to food may encountered. One such inference may be that such a reaction is a feature of a problematic relationship to food. In contrast to this, a number of speakers produce accounts indicating that they do assess particular food activities in a negative manner. In doing so, any suppositions arising from their denial of guilt - such as that their approach to food is not monitored or regulated - are rejected.

In this chapter I have considered men’s talk about issues that may be construed as problematic. In the following two analyses I wish to move on from topics relating to individual food consumption and consider men’s talk about how food is dealt with in the household context.

## **CHAPTER FIVE**

## 5.0 Food in the household

As I considered in the previous chapter, the relationship to food experienced by men and women has been generally constructed as very different. Moreover, gender has been formulated as a significant factor in food preferences. In this chapter I will consider men's talk about another issue that has been constructed as a site of significant gender difference. - the household context. In recent years, there has been a considerable amount of analytic work undertaken upon this arena from, primarily, a feminist orientation. The general proposition made by much of this work is that women, as a consequence of the 'female role', are responsible for the domestic context. Such responsibility, it is claimed, is a feature of unequal power relations between men and women.

In this chapter I will examine men's talk about two household tasks related to food - cooking and shopping. Before considering the extracts, I will first explore the way in which feminist knowledges have constructed the household context as patriarchal in nature. I will then consider the ways in which such inequalities are manifest in relation to the provision of food. Finally, I will examine how men's involvement in the household context has been formulated as of growing significance in relation to both shopping and cooking.

### 5.1 The patriarchal household

According to Delphy (1979) the dynamics of the household context in the West are patriarchal in nature. Research has classified as patriarchal the unequal distribution of domestic tasks such as housework. Oakley (1976), for example, has argued that women, via the female role, are deemed responsible for the domestic context and thus this form of work. However, while housework is equally demanding as industrial labour, she argues that considerably less value is placed on it.

Giddens (1989) relates women's responsibility for the household to the division of labour that occurred as a consequence of urbanisation. As he suggests (*op.cit.*, pp.508):

with the development of workplaces separate from the home, production also became separated from consumption. Men, the producers, 'went out to work': the home, the domain of women, became a place in which goods were consumed in the process of family life.

It is thus women who have been traditionally associated with domestic labour - which has become part of the female role. The traditional male role, by contrast, revolves around the production of financial resources for the household. According to Pahl (1984) the differences in role between men and women render any notion of the family or household as a 'unit' problematic. The reason for this, he argues, is that the different roles played by men and women accord the male a greater degree of power. Male power, in this respect, is often derived from the significance accorded to income within the household context. Pahl suggests that the greater the proportion of the household income that a spouse contributes, the greater influence they will have on how that income is distributed. Men, as 'producers', more generally have occupations that are better paid and full time. Consequently they normally contribute a greater proportion of the household income and thus possess a greater degree of power within this context.

Other theorists agree. Delphy and Leonard (1980), on the basis of an empirical examination of division of labour on French farms, propose that access to resources was always tainted by the assumption that they *belong* to the male provider. In relation to this research they argue that women were generally able to exert little influence over the distribution of financial resources. Wight (1987) makes a somewhat different point. He asserts that his ethnographic study of a small town in Scotland revealed that women did have considerable responsibility over the allocation of financial resources. However he also suggests that they were responsible to the male for these

decisions. Consequently, resources were often allocated in terms of male preferences - for example, the foods purchased.

## 5.2 Food distribution

As a domestic task, women are responsible for purchasing, preparing and cooking food in the household. Numerous studies, such as those undertaken by Delphy (1979), Ellis (1983), McKie and Wood (1991) and Price and Sephton (1991) have proposed that women assume responsibility for the purchase and preparation of food. However, it is not simply undertaking such tasks that is the responsibility of women, but the requirement to perform them in a manner that satisfies the needs and desires of the household. Consequently, food is generally prepared in accordance with the preferences of others, and particularly men. As Charles and Kerr (1988, p.63-4) suggest, on the basis of their empirical research:

Women as servers and providers of food usually prioritise other people's needs over their own....food was seen as playing an important part in maintaining the couple relationship, in expressing affection between partners and in ensuring men remained happy and contented with their wives.

Women are expected to demonstrate the significance of their role as wife or mother via the preparation of food that is enjoyed by the household (Wood, 1995). By providing food in this way, traditional roles and relationships within the family are maintained. According to Murcott (1983), a 'cooked dinner', not only satiates hunger but also (*op.cit.*, p.179): "symbolises the home, a husband's relation to it, his wife's place within it and their relationship to one another". Food thus plays a symbolic role in defining and maintaining the social relationships that are manifest within the household. As such, its selection, preparation and consumption is imbued with the

power relationships that are a feature of this context. As Thorogood and Coulter (1992, p.53) suggest:

In the patriarchal family which is still the norm, the woman's role as 'good' wife and mother is closely bound up with expectations surrounding the provision of 'proper' meals for her husband and children.

It has been argued that expectations such as these, if contravened, may provide a basis for domestic difficulties. Ellis (1983) for example, argues that a woman's refusal to perform a task such as cooking in accordance with male preferences is often the trigger for domestic violence or tension. The reason for this, she suggests, is the role of food preparation as a symbol of women's subordination to men. As a consequence of this symbolic role, a refusal to prepare food may thus be viewed as a challenge to male authority.

I have examined so far the proposition that women cook for men as a consequence of patriarchal dynamics within the household (e.g. Charles and Kerr, 1988). Male preferences are thus accorded a greater degree of significance than the preferences of the woman herself. This state of affairs is problematic for a number of women who prefer lighter foods than men in order to live up to the cultural ideal of a 'slim' body (Price and Sephton, 1991). However, by preparing food in accordance with male preferences, it is claimed that women are often forced to prepare a second meal to satiate their own desires - a process that involves a considerable degree of extra effort. McKie *et al.* (1993) assert that one woman in their empirical research produced an example of this practice - claiming that she may provide one meal with chips for the male, and another with a baked potato, for herself.

In addition to cooking, another commonly cited aspect of the female role is that of gatekeeper of the family's health (Thorogood and Coulter, 1992). On the basis of this aspect, it is argued, many health promotion messages regarding healthy eating have been aimed at, and promulgated

amongst, women (Pill and Parry, 1989). However, as women are expected to cater for male preferences within the household, it may be the case that they are unable to effect such change - change that may be resisted by men who, it is claimed, have generally less healthy preferences (McKie and Wood, 1991).

Within the household, it is also argued that men are also often thought to require a greater quantity of food and are given larger portions accordingly (Price and Sephton 1991). As I discussed earlier, there is also a common perception that men require certain foods, such as red meat, to enable them to remain 'big and strong' (Thorogood and Coulter 1992). The foods often associated with men are, however, often the most expensive. Consequently, in order to provide these for the male, females in poorer households may have to eat less or buy cheaper foods for themselves (Charles and Kerr, 1988).

I have examined so far the way in which the provision of food in the domestic arena has been constructed as the responsibility of women. I will now consider how men's role within this arena has generally been formulated by previous research.

### 5.3 Men in the domestic environment.

Much research has constructed tasks such as shopping and cooking as female responsibilities (e.g. Charles and Kerr, 1988). This construction has been reproduced by theorists such as Lang *et al.* (1996) who argue, on the basis of empirical research involving both men and women, that men are far less confident and less interested in cooking than women. Men's involvement in cooking is generally formulated as specific to certain instances such as the preparation of special meals or snacks (Charles and Kerr, 1988). This relates to the common perception that the only men who cook routinely at home are those who are 'women-less' (Coxon, 1983).

Men's role in shopping has also generally been constructed as minimal (e.g. Davis and Bell 1991). It has been argued that in the late 1980s, only 30% of all men surveyed in a sample of the UK population claimed to have responsibilities relating to grocery shopping (Falconer, 1988). In contrast, 85% of all women in this survey made the same claim. It has been suggested, however, that men are becoming increasingly involved in this task. Pier and Capella (1993), for example, propose that the numbers of men undertaking grocery shopping has increased considerably over the last decade. One reason for this, they argue, is a trend towards a greater degree of shared responsibility within the household. They go on to offer an explanation for this state of affairs (*op.cit.*, p.22):

The change in who is performing the grocery shopping in married couple households has been facilitated by an amelioration in attitudes towards the sharing of chores by both sexes. Attitude changes have resulted in males not only feeling more obligated but also seeking a higher level of involvement in the acceptance and performance of household chores.

The argument here is that there have been considerable changes in the distribution of labour within the household. Men, it is suggested, are becoming increasingly involved in the domestic arena and thus undertaking tasks such as cooking and shopping as a consequence of their desire for equity. Moreover, the changing nature of family structure is also giving rise to an increasing number of men becoming involved in tasks such as shopping. As Davies and Bell suggest (1991, p.25):

The family unit is losing its pre-eminence as the most significant social group and the role of the female in any household continues to change as male and female roles become increasingly blurred. Males in single-person households, in one-parent families, in homosexual partnerships and in many heterosexual partnerships shop regularly for groceries, sometimes accompanied, sometimes alone.



In addition to the processes of social change pertaining to the family, it is argued that technological advances have increasingly enabled men to become involved in household tasks such as cooking (e.g. Lang *et al.*, 1996). Change may be observed in technologies determining the ways in which food is produced and prepared. Innovations such as the freezer and microwave have reduced the amount of time spent cooking and allowed more time for other activities. Convenience products utilising technology such as this have de-skilled certain aspects of the cooking process. As such, men who are commonly considered to have less skill and confidence in the kitchen (Coxon, 1983), are able to play a more significant role.

Technological changes have been constructed by many theorists (e.g. Lang *et al.*, 1996) as affording men considerable opportunities to become more involved in cooking. However, in contrast to this argument, Goodman and Redcliffe (1991) propose, from a feminist position, that irrespective of the level of men's involvement, it is still women who retain the responsibility for ensuring these tasks are completed as a consequence of patriarchal dynamics. Consequently, while the distribution of labour may be changing, they argue that underlying power relationships have not evolved in a commensurate manner.

In this piece of research I examine men's talk about cooking and shopping - two of the significant domestic tasks undertaken in relation to food. The arguments I have considered so far have formulated these tasks as primarily the responsibility of women - although it has been asserted that men's involvement in them is increasing. In the two analyses that follow, I consider men's talk about these tasks. In the first analysis I examine responses to questions relating to cooking. These questions generally revolved around the theme of who does the cooking and were asked during interview three. In the second analysis, I consider men's responses to similar kinds of questions relating to shopping. Again, these questions were asked in the third interview.

#### 5.4 Men's talk about cooking

In the first three extracts of this analysis I will consider how respondents assert that the cooking is undertaken by their partner. In extracts 1 and 3 both respondents state that their "wife" does the cooking (line 2). In extract 2 the speaker responds to the question by saying simply "Susan" (line 2). Note how the minimal and direct nature of the claims produced work to characterise this state of affairs as factual

##### Extract 1 - R3III, pp.4

- |   |    |                               |
|---|----|-------------------------------|
| 1 | I: | who cooks the meals           |
| 2 | R: | (.2) the wife                 |
| 3 | I: | (.4) always                   |
| 4 | R: | (.) always]                   |
| 5 | I: | [ha ha                        |
| 6 | R: | ha ha ha (.4) an easy answer. |

##### Extract 2 - R5III, pp.2

- |   |    |                                     |
|---|----|-------------------------------------|
| 1 | I: | who does the cooking                |
| 2 | R: | (.) Susan                           |
| 3 | I: | (.2) every day                      |
| 4 | R: | (1) y:es almost (.) yep I would say |
| 5 |    | almost every day..                  |

##### Extract 3 - R2III, pp.1-2

- |   |    |                                      |
|---|----|--------------------------------------|
| 1 | I: | who cooks the meals                  |
| 2 | R: | (.) oh my wife all the time ha ha ha |
| 3 | I: | (.) all the time                     |
| 4 | R: | (1) ermm:mm as far as cooking is     |
| 5 |    | concerned all the time..             |

All the respondents also affirm the regularity of their partner doing the cooking either in response to a second question (e.g. "always": extract 1, line 4) or, in the case of extract 3, subsequent to the utterance that his wife does the cooking ("oh my wife all the time": line 2). Consequently, their own involvement in this task is minimised.

In extract 4 the speaker similarly asserts that his wife does the majority of the cooking. However, in contrast to the direct and unequivocal claims produced in the preceding extracts, this respondent speaker works up a case to account for such a state of affairs.

Extract 4 R1III pp.3

- |   |    |   |
|---|----|---|
| 1 | I: | who actually cooks the meals  |
| 2 | R: | (.2)  |
| 3 |    | right (.2) em (.) well on the whole the first person through the door (.2)          |
| 4 |    | if it's me then I'll do it i:f (.) if it's Jane she'll do ermm:m if it (.6) the run |
| 5 |    | of the mill stuff tends to more fall on Jane's shoulders cos sh-she works           |
| 6 |    | on a Tuesday and a Wednesday (.4) so she will work (.) she'll er:::er (.)           |
| 7 |    | prepare the meal on the Monday (.) a Thursday and a Friday because (.)              |
| 8 |    | she happens to be in before me because she's in all the time..                      |

On lines 4 to 5 he suggests that his wife does the majority of the routine cooking ("the run of the mill stuff tends more to fall on Jane's shoulders"). The reasoning he produces for this is pragmatic. On lines 5 to 6 the speaker suggests that his wife works on both a Tuesday and Wednesday and consequently, "she'll...prepare the meal on the Monday (.) a Thursday and a Friday because (.) she happens to be in before me because she's in all the time" (lines 7-8). This assertion warrants his prior claim, produced on lines 3 to 4, that cooking is generally undertaken by the "first person through the door" - which suggests it is not the responsibility of any particular individual (a claim re-stated on line 4, "if it's me then I'll do it i:f (.) it's Jane she'll do it"). Consequently, while the degree to which he undertakes the routine cooking is downplayed as a consequence of his wife's part time work, his *potential* involvement is accentuated.

So far I have considered extracts in which the speakers assert that their partner does most, or all, of the cooking. By contrast, in the following three extracts, I will consider how speakers describe their own involvement in tasks that may potentially be characterised as 'cooking'. In the first two of these, extracts 5 and 6, the respondents refute this potential characterisation.

Extract 5 - R5III, pp.2 (continuation of extract 2)

1 I: wha-what times would you cook  
 2 R: (1) ermm:mm (2) depends (2) mostly it is just if I'm at work or else (.)  
 3 about to go to work (.) if we're both kind of in the house (.2) a day off  
 4 or whatever (.) Susan'll just cook (.4) ermm I'll cook lunch now and  
 5 again although it's not really cooking I'll (.4) throw a couple of bridies  
 6 or something in the oven (.2) but not (.) not cooking a meal..

Extract 6 - AB III, pp.2

1 I: ermm do you ever cook a full meal with (.) when your wife is here  
 2 R: (.4) no (.) I don't say I would (.) the kitchen's (.4) not really allowed in  
 3 the kitchen when she's around ermm:mm (.6) what we tend to do is::s  
 4 (.) have a pretty plain breakfast (.2) and I lay that out but there's no  
 5 cooking attached to it simply (.) making the coffee ermm:mm this  
 6 morning we had grapefruit and toast with banana (.2) often instead of  
 7 grapefruit it's cereal (.2) nothing requiring cooking at breakfast (.4)  
 8 never (.) ermm never never ermm:mm (.) at home do we have a cooked  
 9 breakfast of any kind (.4) ermm (.) so all I do there is::s lay the things  
 10 out and (.2) I do that every morning but there's no cooking attached to  
 11 it.

In these extracts the speakers both produce examples of food related tasks that they undertake for themselves and their partner in response to a question asking about their involvement in cooking. While in extract 6 the respondent claims not to cook when his wife is at home (a proposition embedded within the question: lines 1-2), in extract 5 the speaker states that he will cook for himself while at work or just before going to work (lines 2-3). He also, and subsequently, asserts "If we're both kind of in the house (.) a day off or whatever (.) Susan'll just cook" (lines 3-4). Despite this, on line 4, he makes reference to a cooking task he does perform while they are both at home. He states "I'll cook lunch now and again". In extract 6, the respondent similarly acknowledges carrying out a food task - preparing breakfast - for his wife and himself: "what we tend to do is::s have (.) a pretty plain breakfast (.2) and I lay that out".

Both speakers characterise this task as not cooking. In extract 5, the respondent states "although it's not really cooking" (line 5). In extract 6 the speaker produces a similar claim: "but there's no cooking attached to it" (lines 4-5). This characterisation is warranted in both extracts by a

description of the kind of activities that constitute the tasks performed. In extract 6, the speaker produces a detailed exposition regarding the nature of the breakfast prepared (lines 6-11) stressing that it involves no cooking. For example, on lines 6 to 8, he states “this morning we had grapefruit and toast with banana (.2) often instead of grapefruit it’s cereal (.2) nothing requiring cooking at breakfast”.

In extract 5 the speaker similarly indicates that the task he performs involves no cooking. On line 5 he suggests “I’ll (.4) throw a couple of bridies or something in the oven”. By employing the term “throw”, the respondent characterises this task as involving little practical involvement and skill. Consequently, his assertion that it is not really cooking (an undertaking common-sensically regarded as requiring some degree of endeavor), is substantiated. Moreover, by subsequently developing an implicit contrast between this task and preparing a meal, he warrants the claim that this kind of lunch is not cooking. Following his description of cooking lunch he suggests, “but not (.) not cooking a meal” (line 7). The supposition arising from this claim is that a “meal” requires cooking, and thus that the lunch he prepares does not.

In the previous two extracts, by characterising their involvement in preparing food for the household (i.e. breakfast and lunch) as not cooking, the speakers warrant their claim that they don’t cook when their partners are at home. In the following extract, a similar device is employed by the respondent to assert that he does not cook.

#### Extract 7 - R3III, pp.5

- |   |    |   |
|---|----|---|
| 1 | I: | do you ever cook  |
| 2 | R: | (.) nup (.6) not really   |
| 3 | I: | (.4) not really   |
| 4 | R: | (.) naa (.2) I wouldn't class it as cooking me (.2) naa I don't cook (.4) |
| 5 |    | nup (.4) and if I had to I'd just have meals here [referring to work].    |

On line 2 the speaker initially produces a direct and negative response to the question (“nup”) but subsequently modifies this to “not really” (line 2). By modifying his claim in this manner, he implicitly acknowledges that he may perform tasks that could be described as cooking. This acknowledgment influences the subsequent turn, as the interviewer repeats “not really” as a request for elaboration (line 3). On line 4 the speaker provides an explanation for the discrepancy between his claim that he doesn’t cook, and the acknowledgment that he may undertake tasks that could be characterised as such. He suggests “I wouldn’t class it as cooking me”. This statement explicitly formulates what he does as not cooking by asserting that he classifies it as such. By producing this claim in the form of a personal opinion (“I wouldn’t class it”: line 4), the speaker substantiates his initial negative response to the question (“nup: line 2) - which is thus tacitly formulated as a subjective assessment of what constitutes cooking (and indeed subsequently re-stated, “I don’t cook”: line 4). Moreover, he further warrants his claim of not cooking by asserting that if he was required to do so, he would eat meals at work instead (line 5).

So far in the analysis I have considered how speakers assert that they do little or no cooking within the household. In the following two extracts I examine how speakers display a sensitivity to a particular inference that may arise from the claim that they don’t cook. In these extracts both speakers assert that they are *able* to cook if required to do so. This assertion implicitly denies any inferences that they do not have the ability to cook in such circumstances.

Extract 8 - R7111, pp.6 (continuation of extract 9)

- |   |    |   |
|---|----|---|
| 1 | I: | when do you cook  |
| 2 | R: | (.4) on my days off (.) and weekends                                      |
| 3 | I: | (.6) is that every week   |
| 4 | R: | (.2) no::o (.6) once in a while (.) maybe once every two months or so     |
| 5 |    | (.6) but when I'm on my own (.8) given the chance I can cook every        |
| 6 |    | day I mean usually Sandy makes sure that she leaves enough meals in       |
| 7 |    | the freezer (.) pre-cooked (.) so I don't have hassle cos of my work (.4) |
| 8 |    | but if I'm off work on my holidays so then I can prepare meals as any     |
| 9 |    | (.2) any other would so (.2) I've no hassle in preparing meals.           |

Extract 9 - R2III, pp.1-2 (continuation of extract 3)

- 1 I: who cooks the meals  
 2 R: (.) oh my wife all the time ha ha ha  
 3 I: (.) all the time  
 4 R: (1) ermm:mm as far as cooking is concerned all the time except of  
 5 course when she's away (.) that doesn't mean to say I'm completely  
 6 handless ermmmm::mm (.2) in fact (.4) I probably (1) can do at  
 7 least as much as most other men and when (.)when she's away which is  
 8 (.6) ah from time to time either visiting (.) children grandchildren or::r  
 9 ermm:mm fortnight ago she was away for a week in Mull and I  
 10 survived that]  
 11 I: [ha ha  
 12 R: without any problem (1) I'm an expert on custard ermm::mm (2) I can  
 13 grill chops ermm:mm (1) I can go through the whole shooting match  
 14 without it being ermm:mm (.4) ermm:mm terribly exciting (.8) pretty  
 15 much an expert on er::r nice (.) big cooking apples with the core out of  
 16 them stuffed with er::r er raisins that kind of thing.

In both extracts the speakers orientate to the supposition that they may be unable to cook - a supposition arising in connection with a claim minimising their degree of involvement in this task.

In extract 8, after asserting that he might cook once every two months (line 4), the speaker states “but when I’m on my own (.8) given the chance I can cook every day” (lines 5-6). By employing the phrase “can” within this utterance, it is his ability to cook in such circumstances that is stressed. Similarly, in extract 9, the respondent proposes that his wife does all the cooking when she is at home (lines 1 to 5). He subsequently asserts “that doesn’t mean to say I’m completely handless” (lines 5-6). This latter statement makes relevant and explicitly denies the supposition that he can’t cook.

As these accounts unfold, both speakers substantiate the assertion that they do not lack the ability to cook in two ways. First, they produce an assessment of their cooking abilities as equal to others. This assessment implies that they are of no less competence than is usual. In extract 9 the respondent characterises his capabilities as of equal standing to the majority of other men. He states “I probably (1) can do at least as much as most other men” (lines 6-7) and thus asserts that

he does not possess a lower level of cooking ability than other members of a reference group who are common-sensically constructed as possessing a limited degree of competence in relation to such household tasks. In extract 8 the speaker similarly suggests that his capabilities are comparable to others: "I can prepare meals as any...other would" (lines 8-9). By employing the vague phrase "any other" in this utterance, he produces a general claim implying that his competence is of no less than average. Again, this works to dispel the potential supposition that he cannot cook.

The second way in which the speakers assert that they do not lack the ability to cook is by proposing that they are competent to cook *regularly* when required to do so. In extract 8, on lines 5 to 6, the speaker states "but when I'm on my own (.8) given the chance I can cook every day". This utterance asserts that the respondent has the competence to cook for himself on a daily basis: a task that requires a certain amount of cooking ability. In extract 9 a similar claim is produced by the speaker who states he was able to provide food for himself for a week during his wife's absence. On lines 9 to 12 he claims "she was away for a week in Mull and I survived that without any problem". Again the implication of this utterance is that he has the ability to cook regularly for himself (i.e. for the period of a week). Moreover, this speaker also provides a number of examples of foods he is able to cook (lines 12-16) and suggests "I can go through the whole shooting match without it being...terribly exciting" (lines 13-14). These assertions further substantiate his claim that he is able to cook, but downplays the degree of competence he exhibits.

In contrast to the extracts I have considered so far - in which the speakers claim to do little or no cooking and orientate to potential inferences arising from this state of affairs - in the next two extracts I will examine how speakers describe cooking that they do undertake.



Extract 10 - R5111, pp.3

- 1 I: do you ever cook  
2 R: (.2) yes sometimes (.6) ermm (.) I tend to cook for myself more (.6) if  
3 I'm working or whatever I'll (.2) cook something to have later on (.) I  
4 very rarely cook for both of us (.2) it's only if it's just for me if I cook  
5 something.

Extract 11 - R7111, pp.6

- 1 I: when do you cook  
2 R: (.4) on my days off (.) and weekends  
3 I: (.6) is that every week  
4 R: (.2) no::o (.6) once in a while (.) maybe once every two months..

In both these extracts the speakers characterise their involvement in cooking as irregular and circumstantial. In doing so they downplay their involvement in routine cooking for the household. In extract 10, the speaker suggests that he will “sometimes” (line 2) cook and thus formulates this activity as infrequent. He subsequently claims that he generally cooks for himself (“I tend to cook for myself more”: line 2) and produces an example of an occasion when he may do so “if I’m working or whatever I’ll (.2) cook something to have later on” (lines 2-3). By asserting that he primarily cooks for himself, the speaker tacitly formulates a circumstantial and non-routine basis for his cooking. Moreover, this basis is further substantiated on lines 3 to 5 with the claim “ I very rarely cook for both of us (.2) it’s only if it’s just for me if I cook something”.

In extract 11 the speaker also describes a circumstantial basis for his cooking. In response to a question asking when he will cook (line 1), the speaker states “on my days off (.) and weekends”. By producing this claim the speaker asserts that his cooking takes place when he is not working - and is thus not a daily occurrence. Indeed, as this assertion is provided in a direct manner without reference to regularity, one supposition that may arise is that he cooks routinely on his days off and at weekends. On line 4 the speaker rejects this proposition (articulated in a prior question:

line 3) by stating “no::o (.6) once in a while (.) maybe once every two months”. Consequently, his degree of involvement in cooking generally is minimised.

In extract 12, the speaker similarly states that he does not cook on a “run of the mill” basis (line 4-5) . However, in contrast to the previous two extracts, this speaker claims to undertake the cooking of “special” meals.

Extract 12 - R1111, pp.3-4 (continuation of extract 4)

- 1 I: who actually cooks the meals  
2 R: (.2)  
3 right (.2) em (.) well on the whole the first person through the door (.2)  
4 if it's me then I'll do it i:f (.)if it's Jane she'll do ermm:m if it (.6) the run  
5 of the mill stuff tends to more fall on Jane's shoulders cos sh-she works  
6 on a Tuesday and a Wednesday (.4) so she will work (.) she'll er::er (.)  
7 prepare the meal on the Monday (.) a Thursday and a Friday because (.)  
8 she happens to be in before me because she's in all the time er (.6)  
9 ermm:mm (.) but if there's a special meal I tend to do it (.) like if we  
10 have friends coming round for dinner then I'll do it (.) not because (.4)  
11 Ann's a good cook but (.) it's just I like doing it that's (.) that's almost  
12 like a hobby (.2) it's a bit of relaxation]  
13 I: [yeah  
14 R: so (.2) I like cooking and that's why I do the so- the sort of special (.)  
15 meals.

On line 9 the speaker states “if there is a special meal I tend to do it”. He subsequently produces an example of a dinner party as the kind of occasion for which such a meal would be prepared (“like if we have friends coming round for dinner then I’ll do it” (lines 9-10). Common-sense suggests that such occasions are infrequent. The proposition is thus that the speaker does not cook on a routine or regular basis, but occasionally in circumstances requiring a special meal. This proposition is implicitly warranted by the subsequent claim that he cooks special meals out of choice and for pleasure. He states that his wife has the ability to cook such meals (“Anne’s a good cook”: line 11) but that he chooses to do it because he enjoys doing so (“I like doing it that’s (.) that’s almost like a hobby (.2) it’s a bit of relaxation”). By formulating this activity as

like a hobby undertaken for relaxation, the speaker infers that it is recreational. As recreational pursuits are generally undertaken in free time for pleasure, they are not the kind of activities required to maintain daily living. Consequently, they are not generally considered as everyday routine tasks.

I have so far examined the ways in which the respondents talk about cooking. In the next analysis I will examine discourse pertaining to shopping.

### 5.5 Men's talk about shopping

In the first three extracts of the analysis I will examine how respondents assert that they go shopping. In the following two extracts, both speakers state that they do undertake shopping tasks, yet describe their involvement in a manner designed to downplay its potentially routine nature.

#### Extract 1 R2III, pp.4

- |   |    |   |
|---|----|---|
| 1 | I: | who does the shopping   |
| 2 | R: | (.4) ermm:m (1) a shopping list is prepared (.4) I would think (.8) two |
| 3 |    | out of three times (.4) I nip round to Safeway (.2) sometimes she comes |
| 4 |    | with me (.) but she doesn't walk well..                                 |

#### Extract 2 R3III, pp.3

- |   |    |   |
|---|----|---|
| 1 | I: | who does the shopping   |
| 2 | R: | (.) sometimes me  |
| 3 | I: | (.2) do you   |
| 4 | R: | (.4) sometimes (.) only since we came up here (.2) because it's handy     |
| 5 |    | for::r like you get staff discount and what have you and with us living   |
| 6 |    | across in Sandy Bay it's a bit of a hike for like my wife to come in here |
| 7 |    | shopping..  |

In extract 1 the speaker suggests that he does the majority of the shopping ( “I would think (.8) two out of three times (.4) I nip round to Safeway”: line 2). By formulating this claim as an estimation (the phrase “I would think” denotes it as such), the respondent implies that his involvement in doing the shopping is not fixed and routine. A similar implication arises in connection with the claim produced in extract 2. In this extract the speaker responds to the question by saying “sometimes me” (line 2) - a response that classifies his involvement as occasional. By formulating his involvement as occasional and thus irregular, its potentially routine nature is downplayed.

In both extracts the speakers also produce an account as to their wife’s lack of involvement in shopping. In extract 1, on lines 3 to 4, the respondent asserts “sometimes she comes with me (.) but she doesn’t walk well”. It is thus his wife’s difficulties in walking that are implicitly characterised as the reason for her not playing a larger part in shopping. In extract 2 the speaker develops a pragmatic case (lines 4-7) suggesting, firstly, that it is easier and cheaper to shop at the supermarket where he works (a reference tacitly produced by the notion of staff discount: line 5), and secondly, it would require excessive travelling for his wife to shop there ( “with us living in Sandy Bay it’s a bit of a hike for like my wife to come in here shopping”: lines 5-7). This pragmatic explanation works to account for his wife not being more involved in the shopping and also, implicitly, for why he does it. Moreover, this speaker stresses the significance of the situation in provoking his involvement in shopping. He asserts that this state of affairs has only arisen since he started working at a particular store (“only since we came up here”: line 4).

In common with the previous two extracts, the speaker in extract 3 also makes reference to his wife in accounting for his involvement in shopping. However, in this extract, the speaker claims to do the shopping “exclusively” (line 2) before working up a case to account for this state of affairs.

Extract 3 - R1III, pp.6.

1 I: who does the shopping  
 2 R: (.2) me exclusively  
 3 I: (.) do you  
 4 R: (.2) aye (.2) its actually (.) it's more out of (1) having children that this  
 5 has come about (.) before we had children (.) on the Thursday evening  
 6 we would (.) the two of us would meet we both worked full-time (.)  
 7 we'd both meet (.) go down to Safeway's in Hilliton (.) used to live in  
 8 Marchison Avenue (.2) go down to Safeway's in Hilliton (.) buy the  
 9 shopping and come home (.) the two of us did it (.4) bu::t when Sam  
 10 when John was born err::r after about three months (.) I thought right  
 11 Saturday morning I'll go and get the shopping cos otherwise it's quite  
 12 difficult to get out and it::t's terrible walking around a supermarket with  
 13 (.) young children when there's masses of trolleys about and there's  
 14 loads and loads of people (.4) so (.) I::I I when John was three months  
 15 old (.2) I said Vera look ge- (.) I'll get the sling out you know those  
 16 things that you stick on the front of you and what I used to I faced John  
 17 out the way (.) I didn't face him in the way I faced him out the way so  
 18 he was hanging (.)like this rag doll looking out at the shelves and (.4) I  
 19 (.) took him out partly (.) mainly so that Ann could get a lie in so I  
 20 decided I'll go out to the shops..

On lines 4 to 5 the speaker produces a reason for his exclusive involvement in shopping by asserting “it’s more out of::f having children that this has come about”. Subsequently, after providing a detailed description of the way in which shopping was undertaken by both him and his wife prior to having children (lines 5 to 9), he develops a chronological narrative outlining the reasoning behind the shift from this arrangement to his doing the shopping on a Saturday morning. He first suggests that he decided to do the shopping at this time three months after the birth of his son (lines 10-11) because “otherwise it’s quite difficult to get out” (lines 11-12). On lines 12-14 he explicates the basis of this assertion by invoking the difficulties of undertaking shopping when accompanying young children: “it::t’s terrible walking around a supermarket with (.) young children when there’s masses of trolleys about and there’s loads and loads of people.

On lines 18 to 19 the speaker produces an explanation as to why he takes the child shopping with him “I (.) took him out partly (.) mainly so that Ann could get a lie in”. This claim asserts that primary reason for doing so is to enable his wife to have a rest. Moreover, this motivation is also

explicitly characterised as the basis for his going shopping by the phrase “so I decided I’ll go out to the shops” (line 19-20). Consequently, it is his desire to give his wife a lie in on a Saturday morning that is formulated as the basis for his exclusive involvement in shopping.

In the three extracts I have considered so far the speakers have described a variable degree of involvement in shopping. However, in each of these extracts the respondents have accounted for the nature of their wife’s lesser involvement in this task. In the following two extracts I will consider how speakers describe the different roles played in shopping by themselves and their partner. In the first of these, extract 4, the speaker develops a contrast between the kinds of food bought by himself and his wife.

Extract 4, R3III, pp.3 (continuation of extract 1)

|    |    |   |
|----|----|---|
| 7  | R: | ..so normally I would get the tinned stuff the bulky stuff (.2)           |
| 8  |    | errmm::mm (.) and other bit and pieces she'll just get (.) like the meat  |
| 9  |    | and stuff like that (.2) cheeses and delicatessen and all (.) she'll just |
| 10 |    | get (.2) but like the tinned stuff soap powders (.) bulky stuff like that |
| 11 |    | I'll just get them here.  |

On line 7 he describes the products he would buy as “the tinned stuff the bulky stuff”. In contrast, he produces examples of the different kinds of product purchased by his wife: “the meat and stuff like that (.2) cheeses and delicatessen” (lines 8 to 9). By providing these descriptions, the speaker implicitly formulates his involvement in shopping as purchasing the larger, heavier products, and his wife’s involvement as orientated toward making lighter, more specialist purchases. By developing a contrast between these tasks, the speaker tacitly stresses the different roles being played.

In the following extract, the speaker also claims that he plays a different role to his partner in shopping. In this extract however, the speaker asserts that it is partner who does the shopping (line 2) before subsequently describing the nature of his own role.

Extract 5 - R7III, pp.4

- 1 I: who does the shopping  
2 R: (.4) Mandy does the shopping  
3 I: (.8) do you ever=  
4 R: =oh I go with her (.4) I assist her (.2) but there then since er she is the  
5 person all the time looking after the house (.4) she knows what things  
6 are run down and what things are required in the freezer or (.2) or in  
7 the fridge (.) or in (.2) you know (.8) vegetable racks and things like  
8 that (.2) she's responsible for those kind of things (.6) and I assist her  
9 (.4) with all those things (.) bringing the loads in and out.

On line 4, the speaker characterises his own role in shopping as one of an assistant by stating “oh I go with her (.4) I assist her”. To produce this characterisation, the respondent interrupts the interviewer who is asking a question with regards to the speaker’s involvement. By interrupting in this way, the participant seems to treat the question being asked as potentially accusatory - perhaps as a consequence of negative implications that may arise in connection with the claim that his wife does the shopping (e.g. that he is not involved at all). By subsequently asserting that he does go shopping with his wife, such implications are rejected.

The speaker further describes his role on lines 8 to 9 by producing an example of the kind of task he may perform. He suggests “I assist her (.4) with all those things (.) bringing the loads in and out”. By asserting that he may undertake tasks such as carrying the shopping, the respondent substantiates the formulation of his role as one of an assistant. Such tasks do not involve any responsibility for deciding what is purchased.

It is interesting to note in this extract that the speaker develops a justification as to why his wife does the shopping. On lines 4 to 6 he states “since er she is the person all the time looking after the house (.4) she knows what things are run down and what things are required”. This statement asserts that his partner is familiar with the specific requirements of the domestic environment as a

result of the knowledge accumulated via her responsibility to care for this arena. On the basis of such knowledge (the extent of which is accentuated by a listing of the various storage devices that may require replenishment: lines 6-7), the state of affairs he describes, in which she does the shopping, is implicitly characterised as reasonable.

In the previous two extracts I have examined how the speakers describe the different roles in shopping performed by them and their wives. In extract 5, for example, the speaker formulates shopping as the responsibility of his wife as a consequence of her domestic role. In the following three extracts, I will examine a particular device - the shopping list - that is employed to denote that the female partners of the respondents are responsible for deciding what is bought. This device works to stress the different roles that are played with regards to shopping. In extract 6, after suggesting that he does the majority of the shopping (lines 2-3), the respondent describes his wife's involvement in purchasing smaller items before going on to make relevant her responsibility for ascertaining household needs.

Extract 6 - R2III, pp.4 (continuation of extract 1)

- |   |    |   |
|---|----|---|
| 1 | I: | who does the shopping   |
| 2 | R: | (.4) ermm:mm (1) a shopping list is prepared (.4) I would think (.8)        |
| 3 |    | two out of three times (.4) I nip round to Safeway (.2) sometimes she       |
| 4 |    | comes with me (.) but she doesn't walk well (.2) ermmm:m having             |
| 5 |    | said that (.) ermm:mm (.4) in-between times there are incidental            |
| 6 |    | things ermm:mm if she::s (.6) up at the doctor which is near salisbury      |
| 7 |    | and sometimes without going via the doctor (.2) ermm:mm she'll go           |
| 8 |    | into the fishmonger there (.4) she'll buy little things but the bulk of the |
| 9 |    | shopping is done err:r (.2) by me from a list prepared by her.              |

On line 5 he states that his wife may buy "incidental things" and produces an example of her purchasing fish from an outlet near her doctors (lines 6 to 8). This claim works to develop an implicit contrast between the tasks she performs and those he undertakes - a contrast stated explicitly on lines 8 to 9, "she'll buy little things but the bulk of the shopping is done by me". Subsequent to this utterance, the speaker also asserts that his wife performs the additional task of



deciding what goods will be purchased by writing a shopping list (“from a list prepared by her”: line 9). By asserting that his wife undertakes this task, her role is implicitly characterised as one encompassing responsibility for defining what is required within the domestic arena.

In the following extract the speaker similarly asserts that it is his wife who is responsible for ascertaining household needs. However, in this extract the speaker stresses his equitable involvement in shopping.

Extract 7 - R5III, pp.

- |   |    |  |
|---|----|--|
| 1 | I: | who (.4) who buys the food   |
| 2 | R: | (1) we both do actually (.2) we both go shopping (.4) err::r I suppose     |
| 3 |    | Mary writes the list of what we need but (.) as we go round we'll kind     |
| 4 |    | of (.4) discuss things (.6) say oh (.2) like the sound of that or this one |
| 5 |    | would be better (.2) I suppose we buy it together actually (.6) although   |
| 6 |    | Mary has kinda written a basic list of things that we need..               |

On line 2 the respondent suggests that both he and his wife undertake the shopping (“we both do actually (.2) we both go shopping”. Moreover, he also produces a description of the manner in which they decide consensually what to purchase (lines 3-5). On lines 3 to 4, for example, he states “as we go round we’ll kind (.4) of discuss things” and subsequently asserts “I suppose we buy it together” (line 5). By providing this claim, the speaker implicitly formulates the role played in shopping by both parties (i.e. him and his wife) as involving equal levels of responsibility and influence.

While he characterises shopping as equitable in this way, the respondent also proposes that it is his wife who writes a shopping list - and is thus responsible for ascertaining household needs. This proposition is produced in a tentative and defensive manner. On lines 2 to 3 he states “ I suppose Mary writes the list of what we need”. By employing the phrase “I suppose” within this utterance, it is implicitly formulated as an admission. Similarly, the speaker re-iterates that his

wife has written the shopping list on line 6 by claiming “Mary has kinda written a basic list of things that we need”. Again, the term “kinda” characterises this assertion as tentative. Moreover, the description of this list as “basic” serves to downplay its significance as a basis for the shopping activities that are undertaken. By describing the nature of the list she writes in this way, the respondent does, however, undermine any potential inferences regarding the robustness of his claims - inferences that may arise as a consequence of the discrepancy between his prior description of shopping as a consensual act and his assertion that his wife writes a list of what is required.

In common with the previous two extracts, in extract 8 the respondent proposes that his wife writes the shopping list. However, he subsequently describes his own role in deciding what to purchase in a manner designed to accentuate his involvement in this process.

Extract 8 - R3III, pp.7 (continuation of extract 3)

- |    |    |   |
|----|----|---|
| 39 | R: | get all the food shopping   |
| 40 | I: | [uh hu]   |
| 41 | R: | (.4) Pam makes the list up and I buy it (.) but there's e::r I've got carte   |
| 42 |    | blanche you see (.4) you know it's one of those things that you get this      |
| 43 |    | list (.2) and er:r I::I often think (.) I wonder if there is (.2) I wonder if |
| 44 |    | we've got any flour left (.) I like making bread maybe I wonder (.) I'm       |
| 45 |    | not sure if these any flour that's not something Pam would put on the         |
| 46 |    | list cos she wouldn't look for it (.4) so I'll go (.) I'll buy flour.         |

On line 41 the speaker asserts that his wife makes up the list and he buys it. Subsequent to this, on lines 41 to 42, he suggests that he has “carte blanche” and thus implies that he does not treat the list as definitive. In producing this suggestion, the speaker infers that he plays an active role in deciding what to buy. Moreover, he explicitly works up this notion by first asserting that he may reflect upon what may be required (“I often think...I wonder if there is”: lines 43), and second, by providing an example of a product (flour) that is not on the list but may need replenishment (lines 43-46). Interestingly, the speaker characterises this product as one he may require and thus not

something his wife would consider. Consequently, it is implicitly formulated as not a household requirement of the sort she would identify.

## 5.6 Discussion

In this discussion I will briefly consider some of the actions performed by the speakers when talking about cooking and shopping. The first of these is the construction of cooking as a task undertaken exclusively by their female partners. In extracts 1 to 3 (talk about cooking), the speakers produce this claim in a direct and emphatic manner (e.g. “my wife all the time”: extract 3). Consequently, it is implicitly formulated as a statement of fact - the fact being that their wives undertake cooking on a routine basis. In extract 5 (talk about shopping) the speaker asserts that his wife does the shopping in an equally direct manner (“Mandy does the shopping”). Consequently, this task is also characterised as a routine duty.

By asserting that cooking and shopping are routinely undertaken, the speakers tacitly construct these tasks as responsibilities of their wives. This construction resonates with common-sense understandings pertaining to the distribution of labour within the household. Such understandings, shared and re-produced by many academic knowledges of food (e.g. Charles and Kerr, 1988: McKie and Wood, 1991), construct tasks such as cooking and shopping as the responsibility of women. As this construction is common-place, such responsibilities may be an expectation. Certainly in extracts 1 to 3 (talk about shopping) the speakers account for their wives lesser role in shopping when characterising their own involvement in this task as significant (either doing most or all of the shopping). For example, in extract 2, the speaker makes reference to the practical difficulties faced by his wife in doing the shopping at the supermarket where he works (and thus receives staff discount). Similarly, in extract 1, the respondent suggests his wife occasionally accompanies him shopping but doesn’t walk well.

By accounting for their wives lack of involvement in shopping in this way, the speakers seem to orientate toward the expectation that their partners would play a greater part in this task. As I have considered, an expectation such as this may arise as consequence of the common construction of shopping as a female responsibility (e.g. Davis and Bell, 1991). In describing their involvement in cooking, the respondents also seemed to display a sensitivity toward potentially negative inferences that may arise in connection with the claim that they are involved in cooking. In extracts 5 and 6 (talk about cooking), the speakers acknowledge that they do perform tasks that could potentially be characterised as cooking. However, they produce this acknowledgment in a manner designed to downplay any implications that they cook meals for the household. In both extracts, the speakers assert that the food related tasks they undertake are *not cooking*. They produce examples of the tasks they may perform as a means of substantiating this claim. For example, in extract 5, the speaker suggests that he will “throw a couple of bridies in the oven” in order to prepare lunch. This characterisation downplays the level of time and skill involved and thus warrants his claim that he doesn’t cook.

In extract 7 also (talk about cooking), the respondent characterises the tasks he undertakes as not cooking. Moreover, in this extract, the speaker claims that if he was required to cook he would *refuse* to do so, and eat meals instead at his place of work (“if I had to I’d just have meals here”). This claim acts to stress that cooking is an activity he does not, and would not, partake in.

In designing their claims in this way, the speakers stress that they do not undertake tasks involving cooking. They seem to display a sensitivity to negative inferences arising from a potential state of affairs in which they do cook. One basis for inferences such as these is the construction of cooking an activity that requires a degree of skill and endeavor (e.g. Coxon, 1983), and thus implies a significant involvement in the domestic environment. Moreover, as I have argued,

cooking is also commonly constructed as female responsibility within the household (e.g. Murcott, 1983) - a construction that may lead to expectations that men will not cook. To assert otherwise may infer that their domestic arrangements are not subject to a division of labour. Consequently, the implication may arise that the respondents have some degree of responsibility within the household context.

In extracts 10 to 12 (talk about cooking) the speakers similarly reject notions of responsibility. They produce a description of the cooking they do undertake in a manner designed to reject any implications that it is routine (and thus potentially indicative of responsibility within the domestic context). The descriptions that are provided formulate the cooking they undertake as both irregular (e.g. "sometimes": extract 2) and occurring only in specific circumstances. These circumstances are cooking for self to eat at work (extract 10), cooking when not working (extract 11) and preparing special meals as a hobby (extract 12). As each of these situations is not relevant to everyday, domestic cooking, the implication here is that the speakers do not cook as part of the household routine - an undertaking that may be construed as a domestic responsibility.

In relation to shopping the speakers seem similarly sensitive to negative inferences regarding household responsibility that may arise in connection with the claim that they are involved in this task. In extracts 6 to 8 (talk about shopping) the speakers describe their involvement in shopping in a manner designed to reject any implications that have responsibility for deciding what is required within the household. They do so by asserting that it is their wife who writes the shopping list, and is thus responsible for ascertaining household needs. In extract 6, for example, the speaker claims that he will buy the "bulk" of the shopping from a list "prepared by her". Similarly, in extract 7, the respondent suggests that his wife will write "the list of what we need". By making relevant the shopping list in this way, and claiming that it is written by their female partner, the speakers implicitly reject any implications that they are responsible for the domestic

context - implications that may arise in connection with the claim that they are involved in shopping. Moreover, in extract 8, while the speaker asserts that he will reflect upon the list and buy additional items that may be required, the example he describes is of an item that he, himself, needs to undertake his hobby of making bread. Consequently, the knowledge he displays is not of the household context, but of items required to partake in this activity.

My argument so far has been that the respondents display a sensitivity toward possible inferences that they have a degree of responsibility for the domestic context. By designing their accounts in a manner to reject such implications, they implicitly characterise as problematic a state of affairs in which they do shoulder some responsibility for the household environment. As I have considered, one reason for this may be the common-sensical construction of such responsibilities as female in accordance with a gendered division of labour (Pahl, 1984). Yet speakers also display a sensitivity to potential inferences that this state of affairs may itself be problematic.

In extract 4 (talk about cooking) the speaker claims that routine cooking is mostly undertaken by his wife. However, the manner in which this claim is produced seems designed to reject any potential implications that this state of affairs is inequitable - an implication that may arise as consequence of his own lack of involvement in run of the mill cooking. In this extract the respondent claims that cooking is undertaken by the person first "through the door". He subsequently accounts for his wife regularly undertaking this task by asserting that she spends a considerably higher proportion of time at home than he does. Consequently, his not doing the routine cooking is justified on pragmatic grounds. Moreover, the speaker stresses his potential involvement in such cooking by stating that if he is home first, he will do it ("if it's me then I'll do it").

This participant's sensitivity to potential implications of inequity (arising as a consequence of his wife undertaking the cooking) may relate to understandings problematising the construction of women as responsible for domestic tasks. In recent years feminist knowledges in particular have proposed that women's responsibility for the household arena is a feature of the unequal power relationship between men and women (e.g. McKie and Wood, 1991). Moreover, men's lack of involvement within the domestic arena has been characterised as inequitable, particularly in regards to women's often additional responsibility to supplement household income by working part-time or even full-time (Goodman and Redcliffe, 1991). As understandings such as these have become widely available via their promulgation in media texts, they may constitute resources that are culturally available to be displayed as relevant in talk. Certainly, within these extracts, the respondents display a sensitivity to potential implications of inequality within their accounts.

I have considered already how the speaker in extract 4 (talk about cooking) designs his claim to implicitly reject such potentially negative implications. A similar claim is produced in extract 5 with regards to shopping. In this extract the speaker orientates toward the potential supposition that he is not involved in shopping - a supposition arising in connection with the claim that his wife performs this task ("Mandy does the shopping). By rejecting this state of affairs by describing his role as assistant ("oh I go with her..I assist her"), the speaker displays a sensitivity to potentially negative inferences that may arise from the supposition that he doesn't play a part.

One such inference may be that his not being involved in shopping may be construed as inequitable. Moreover, in this extract, the speaker produces an account as to his wife's involvement in shopping which makes reference to her role as housewife ("she is the person all the time looking after the house"). As a consequence of this role, he asserts that she has greater knowledge of household requirements. This asserting works to justify her doing the shopping, and him not.

In extracts 7 and 8, also, the speakers design the claim that their wives write the shopping list in a manner that downplays any negative inferences regarding the respondent's lack of involvement in deciding what to buy. Such inferences may be problematic because they may suggest that the speaker's wife is entirely responsible for the household context - a responsibility that may resonate with notions of inequality (e.g. Charles and Kerr, 1988).

In extract 7, for example, the speaker characterises the shopping list written by his wife as "basic" and stresses his involvement in deciding what to buy ("I suppose we buy it together"). In extract, 8, similarly, the participant asserts that he has "carte blanche" and thus buys items that may be required but not on the shopping list. By stressing their involvement in deciding what to purchase, the speakers thus reject any possible inferences that their wives are entirely responsible for maintaining the domestic environment.

While inferences regarding a lack of equity seem to be orientated toward by speakers, the possible supposition that they are unable to cook was also displayed as relevant within these extracts. This supposition may arise in connection with the claim that they do very little or no cooking. In extracts 8 and 9 (talk about cooking) both speakers design their accounts in a manner that rejects inability as basis for their lack of involvement. For example, in extract 9, subsequent to a claim that his wife does all the cooking, the speaker suggests "that doesn't mean to say I'm completely helpless". As a similar proposition is made in extract 8 ("given the chance I can cook every day"), the speakers seem sensitive to possible negative implications that may arise from a state of affairs in which they cannot cook. One such implication may be that they are incompetent - an implication that may result in problematic inferences regarding self.



## 5.7 Conclusion

In these analyses the participants design their accounts to reject any implications that they may have domestic responsibilities for food within the household. They do so by denying that they cook, characterising the cooking they undertake as not routine, and asserting that their wife has responsibility for ascertaining household needs. A number of participants did, however, display a sensitivity to potential inferences arising from this state of affairs. One such inference is that they are unable to cook. Another was that their lack of involvement in cooking and shopping may be inequitable. Both these inferences were addressed within, and rejected by, the accounts produced.

While in this chapter I have considered how men talk about food tasks undertaken in relation to the household in the next, and final, analytic chapter, I examine how the respondents talk about a topic pertaining to food eaten outside the home: fast food.

## **CHAPTER SIX**

## 6.0 Fast food

In this final chapter I consider talk about one of the most popular forms of dining out: fast food. Before moving on to the analysis, I will examine some of the understandings that have been produced with regards to this kind of food. Firstly, I will consider how academic theorists have highlighted the significance of food consumed outside the home. I will then explore some of the issues that have been highlighted in relation to the increasing popularity of fast food and finally, briefly examine some of the arguments against eating fast-food.

### 6.1 Dining out

By the end of the century, it has been estimated that two out of every three meals will be consumed outside of the household (Love, 1987). This is considered to be a vast shift away from household based eating (Wood, 1995). There are a number of explanations that have been produced to account for the move toward dining out. Finkelstein (1989), for example, argues that eating out is an experience grounded within the processes of self-presentation and the mediation of social relations. In other words, it is a means by which social identities and relationships may be symbolically represented and maintained in a culture where the processes of consumption and self-identity are inherently interlinked (Featherstone, 1991). In some ways this is a similar position to that of Bourdieu (1984), who proposes consumption is the means by which social relations and identities are produced and reproduced over time. Finkelstein, however, develops her argument to suggest that eating out, as a symbolic activity, has become 'uncivilised'. As she states (Finkelstein 1989, p.5):

Styles of interaction encouraged in the restaurant produce an uncivilised sociality. The artifice of the restaurant makes dining out a mannered exercise disciplined by customs that locate us in a framework of pre-figured actions.....if it is the case that dining out is a practice which mitigates thought and prevents insight into the manners of everyday sociality, if it prevents, in short, the examined life, then the practice of dining out is a constraint on our moral development and, subsequently, a rich source of incivility.

The main argument here is that dining out is organised and structured to the extent that particular forms of restaurants offer specific, rigid styles of interaction. These styles characterise dining out as mannered. Consumers are thus required to mimic the behaviour of others in relation to prevailing fashions. Consequently, dining out is not an act through which diverse and new forms of individuality can be established and maintained, but one in which consumers do not consider the basis or nature of their behaviour. It is uncivilised because it fails to demand meaningful engagement with others.

Finkelstein's argument has been characterised as somewhat deterministic due to its emphasis on the pre-figured nature of the dining out experience (e.g. Wood, 1995). However, the theoretical position she adopts is one that stresses the symbolic basis of dining out. In contrast to this Mennell (1985), as a developmentalist, takes an approach that situates dining out within wider socio-historical processes pertaining to food. He argues that over centuries, Western eating habits have gradually diminished in contrast but increased in variety. The contrasts resulting from seasonally based production, and thus consumption, have now been eroded by developments in technology and transportation. Similarly, he argues, there also has been a decrease also in the contrast between professional elite cookery and everyday cooking - as a consequence of cookery books, pre-prepared foods, media discussion of cooking techniques and the increasing number and diversity of restaurants and hotels.

At the same time as such diminishing contrasts, Mennell proposes that there has been a proliferation in the varieties of food available. For example, he stresses the increasing number of ethnic cuisines available both in restaurant and supermarket contexts. As these cuisines may be bought to be consumed outside (i.e. in restaurants) and inside the home (i.e. take away, or pre-prepared food), he argues a situation has arisen in which dining-out involves eating the same varieties of foods that are available for consumption within the home. Consequently, he proposes it is the symbolic and economic value accorded to dining-out that

is the reason for its increasing popularity. Wood (1994) develops this point by arguing an increasing emphasis is placed upon the context in which food is consumed in addition to other factors. As he suggests, in relation to restaurants, (*op.cit.*, p.12):

choice may present itself in terms of familiar products...but the value of that choice is measured in terms of the contextual factors such as clean environments in which to eat: cheapness of food and value for money: and convenience of purchasing ready-made over the costs of preparing the food itself.

One of the significant factors in dining out characterised by Wood (1994) is that of convenience. Moreover, he argues that a whole industry has developed in providing ready-made, or 'fast' foods outside the home (to be taken away or eaten in a restaurant context).

## 6.2 The convenience dimension

Fast-food prepared outside the home is characterised as an important feature of contemporary food consumption. In the UK alone, one company (MacDonalds) generated a turnover of £622 million in 1994 and is still continuing to expand its operation (Euromonitor, 1996). The yearly market for fast and take away food in general is valued at over £5 billion pounds. This is estimated to increase by up to 9% in the next five years (Euromonitor, 1996).

While it is argued that two thirds of all fast-food bought in the UK is consumed as take away (Wood, 1994), fast-food restaurants are increasing in popularity (Euromonitor, 1996). These contexts have been described as offering a specific dining experience (Wood, 1994). This experience includes standardised menus, chairs and tables fixed to the floor, bright neon lighting and a concept of 'family fun' promoted throughout. According to Ritzer (1993), this experience is underpinned by a set of fast food ideals or principles. Moreover, he argues that these principles are increasingly impacting upon many aspects of society - a progression which he defines as 'MacDonaldisation'. This, he suggests, is (*op.cit.*, p.1):

the process by which the principles of the fast-food restaurant are coming to dominate more and more sectors of American Society as well as the rest of the world.....MacDonaldisation not only affects the restaurant business, but also education, work, travel, leisure-time activities, politics, the family and virtually every other sector of society.

Ritzer identifies four specific fast food principles upon which MacDonaldisation is premised.

The first, he suggests, is that of efficiency. A fast food system is designed primarily to promote the optimum method for getting from one point to another. This involves a process of providing food as quickly as possible. The second principle he identifies is that of quantification and calculability. There are two dimensions to this. The first is that of quantity and value for money. The emphasis on large portions in relation to low costs is a primary calculation promoted by fast food restaurants. The second dimension is that of time. The minimal time it takes to get to, and eat, in a fast food restaurant is a key factor in their success. This factor he claims, is stressed by such restaurants in their marketing and promotional materials.

The third fast food principle underpinning MacDonaldisation is that of predictability (Ritzer, 1993). Standardised products, in terms of both content and production methods, are available in all outlets of the same chain franchises. It is not simply the product that is standardised but the very experience of eating: for example, regularly cleaned floors and behaviour learned by staff from handbooks. Consequently, it is argued that the fast food restaurant offers a stable environment presenting little difficulty or risk to those who eat within it. It is the stability, simplicity and unchanging nature of this environment that allows it to become 'ordinary'. Fast-food restaurants thus offer products that are almost inseparable from the very notion of everyday routine food, except in the fact that they are generally consumed outside the home (Visser, 1992). Moreover, the availability of fast food releases members of the family from the processes involved in preparing meals and thus offers them a greater degree of leisure time - an important demand in 'consumer' culture (Wynne, 1990).

The final principle of fast food underpinning MacDonaldisation produced is that of control, especially through the substitution of non-human for human technology. This impacts on both staff and customers of fast-food outlets in various ways. As Ritzer suggests (1993, p.11):

The humans who work in fast-food restaurants are trained to do a very limited number of things in precisely the way they are told to do them...the human beings who eat in fast food restaurants are also controlled....lines, limited menus, few options and uncomfortable seats all lead diners to do what the management wishes them to do - eat quickly and leave.

It is to the four principles of Macdonaldisation that Ritzer attributes the success of fast food restaurants. However, such principles are not simply inherent within a fast food operation, but are constructed by Ritzer as an aspect of the rationalisation continuing within Western culture as a whole - a culture constantly striving for increased levels of economic efficiency. Finkelstein (1989) produces a similar claim, suggesting (*op.cit.*, p.46):

The vast popularity of fast-foods shows that the meaning of food has become intricately interwoven with the macrosocial conditions of economics and politics.

The growth in fast-food restaurants has thus been linked to the dynamic social context within which consumption is situated. However, the increasing popularity of the provision and consumption of food in this manner has been formulated in a negative manner. Ritzer (1993), for example, objects to the overtly 'rational' practices encouraged by fast-food chains as a consequence of their de-humanising effects - both on staff and diners. There has also been concern expressed with regards to the business practices of fast food operators such as MacDonalds. Issues such as global trade and multinational growth, employee rights and advertising strategies have all been characterised in a negative manner. For example, it has been argued that MacDonald's promotional strategy is primarily aimed at children via the

figure of Ronald MacDonald. This, it is asserted, may result in tremendous peer pressure amongst children to purchase food from such outlets (Love, 1987).

Concerns have also been expressed with regards to the environmental impact of fast food chains such as MacDonalds. As Macspotlight (1997, unpublished www page) state:

in the last 100 years the modern industrial system in general, and transnational corporations in particular, have ruthlessly exploited natural resources all around the world, inflicting damage on forests and other eco-systems, reducing bio-diversity, causing land, sea and air pollution and even adversely affecting the global climate. MacDonald's contribution to this destruction is mainly through the effects of cattle ranching (as the world's foremost promoter of a beef based diet and the largest user of beef) through the growing and transportation of cash crops, and through the production and disposal of thousands of tonnes of packaging materials.

Arguments such as these construct fast food in a manner that stresses its negative environmental impact. A different, but equally negative construction, relates to its detrimental effect on health. It is argued that links have been established between highly artificial, high fat, high sugar and high salt foods of the sort available in fast food restaurants, and health conditions such as coronary heart disease, diabetes, various cancers and gum decay (Scottish Office, 1993). Such links, proposes Cox (1986), accentuate the highly damaging nature of the food available in such contexts. Moreover, other concerns for health arising in connection with restaurants such as MacDonalds relates to their use of meats that may be, or have been, infected with bio-organisms such as E-coli (MacSpotlight, 1997).

### 6.3 Men's talk about fast food

While many of the understandings that have been produced regarding fast-food highlight its growing popularity, the ways in which this form of consumption is constructed in accounts is not a feature of existing research. In this analysis I will examine the discursive actions of men in talking about fast food as a means of considering the kinds of constructions that are



produced and reasoning procedures that may be displayed as relevant. Men's talk about this topic is interesting because it is argued that men eat more food out of the household (Gregory *et al.*, 1990). Moreover, the beef based foods available in fast food outlets are also characterised as more relevant to men as a consequence of the links between red meat and masculinity (Thorogood and Coulter, 1992).

In the following extracts, I examine responses to questions asking if the respondents ever go to MacDonalds or fast food restaurants such as Burger King. These questions were asked during interview two in conjunction with other questions regarding eating out.

In the first five extracts of this analysis, I examine how the respondents produce a denial that they go to fast food restaurants. In extracts 1 and 2, the speakers provide a direct response to the question.

Extract 1 - R6II, pp.6

- |   |    |   |
|---|----|---|
| 1 | I: | do you ever go to places like MacDonalds or Burger King |
| 2 | R: | (.) no  |
| 3 | I: | (.4) no   |
| 4 | R: | (.2) no.  |

Extract 2 R1II, pp.02

- |   |    |  |
|---|----|--|
| 1 | I: | what about MacDonalds (.) things like that |
| 2 | R: | (.) wouldn't touch them                    |
| 3 | I: | (.8) no                                    |
| 4 | R: | (1) wouldn't touch them.                   |

In extract 1 the speaker responds to the question by stating "no" (line 2). A similarly negative reply is provided in extract 2: "wouldn't touch them" (line 2). This statement accentuates the degree to which fast food is rejected by implying that it is subject to a considerable degree of objection. Moreover, its repetition on line 4 without embellishment or modification (in reply to an implicit request for confirmation by the interviewer) confers upon it a factual status - repetition that is also produced in extract 1 (line 4) to similar effect.

In contrast to the direct denials examined in extracts 1 and 2, in the following two accounts both speakers make relevant the length of time it has been since they last entered a fast food restaurant. They do so as a means of substantiating the assertion that they don't eat at such places.

Extract 3 - R8II, pp.07

- |   |    |  |
|---|----|--|
| 1 | I: | do you ever go to places like Burger King (.4) o:r (.2) MacDonalds |
| 2 | R: | (.) not any more (.) I can't remember the last time I went to      |
| 3 |    | MacDonalds (2) nup (.) naa..                                       |

Extract 4 - R4II, pp.07

- |   |    |  |
|---|----|--|
| 1 | I: | do you ever go to places that you know something like (.) Burger       |
| 2 |    | King   |
| 3 | R: | (.) very rarely (.) very very rarely I (.2) I mean I haven't been in a |
| 4 |    | Burger King or (.) or a MacDonalds in years..                          |

In extract 3, on line 2, the speaker asserts "I can't remember the last time I went to a MacDonalds". By suggesting that he is unable to recall the last time he went, the respondent implies that a considerable period of time has elapsed since this event. In extract 4 a similar claim is produced by the utterance "I mean I haven't been in a Burger King or (.)or a MacDonalds in years" (line 4). Again this assertion formulates as substantial the amount of time it has been since the speaker went to a fast food restaurant. By making reference to length of time in this way, both speakers substantiate the claim that they either go extremely rarely (extract 4, line 3) or no longer at all (extract 3, line 2).

In contrast to the previous four extracts, in extract 5 the speaker does not state whether or not he goes to fast food restaurants. Instead he produces a response to the question that minimises the likelihood of his doing so.

Extract 5 - R7II, pp.03

- |   |    |                                    |
|---|----|------------------------------------|
| 1 | I: | do you ever go to fast food places |
| 2 | R: | (.6) not if I can help it..        |

On line 2 the respondent asserts that he would only eat at fast food places if he was not in a position to resist this course of action. As common sense suggests he would generally have a choice with regards to what kind of restaurant he goes to, the likelihood of his patronising fast food places is downplayed.

In the five extracts I have examined so far, the respondents have produced a denial that they eat at fast food restaurants. In the following four extracts, I will consider how this claim is accounted for. In extract 6, the speaker provides two different reasons for not going to fast food places. The first of these is ecology.

Extract 6 - R4II, pp.07 (continuation of extract 4)

- |    |    |  |
|----|----|--|
| 1  | I: | do you ever go to places that you know something like (.) Burger         |
| 2  |    | King   |
| 3  | R: | (.) very rarely (.) very very rarely I (.2) I mean I haven't been in a   |
| 4  |    | Burger King or (.) or a McDonalds in years (.4) but that's actually a    |
| 5  |    | conscious decision which isn't related to the fact that I don't like     |
| 6  |    | these things it's because er::r (.) years ago somebody told me that      |
| 7  |    | you know (.) that firms like MacDonalds were contributing to             |
| 8  |    | problems in South America because (.2) the cattle they were using        |
| 9  |    | for all these burgers that we were buying (.) were being grazed on       |
| 10 |    | land that used to be rainforest and you know all that sort of stuff      |
| 11 |    | and I said fair enough (.2) if it's true (.2) and I (.) stopped going    |
| 12 |    | there (.) I haven't been for years (1) and I've well (.) I've fallen out |
| 13 |    | the habit of that kind of fast food culture.                             |

On lines 6 to 12 the respondent produces an anecdotal narrative explaining the basis of his decision to stop going fast food restaurants. He suggests that somebody informed him that cattle providing meat for fast food companies were being grazed on former rainforest land, and that this contributed to problems within South America. For this reason, he states, "I (.) stopped going there" (lines 11-12). In developing this narrative, the speaker makes reference to the origin of the information upon which he based his decision to no longer go. On line 6 he asserts "somebody told me". By formulating the basis of this information as a third party (vaguely formulated as "somebody"), its potentially interested nature is acknowledged. This

acknowledgement undermines its factual status, and thus lack of robustness as a reason for ceasing going to fast food restaurants. Moreover, the speaker implicitly asserts that such a lack of robustness was noted when deciding upon a course of action ( “I said fair enough (.2) if it’s true”: line 11) - an assertion that works to undermine any potentially problematic inferences that he takes acts unthinkingly on the basis of contentious and interested propositions.

The second reason produced by the speaker for not eating at fast food restaurants is formulated as a consequence of his stopping doing so in the first place. On lines 12 to 13 he states “I haven’t been for years...I’ve fallen out of the habit of that kind of fast food culture”.

The proposition made here is that fast food is no longer habitual as a result of his prior decision to stop going. Note here how he formulates fast food places in this utterance as “that kind of fast food culture”. This phrase constructs fast-food as a *culture*, which implies it encompasses specific assumptions and practices. Such a construction tacitly lends robustness to the speaker’s assertion that he has fallen out of the *habit* of eating fast food - as such assumptions and practices may be considered as culturally ingrained.

While in this extract the speaker produces two forms of reasoning for not eating at fast food restaurants, he also states that he doesn’t like them (lines 5-6). Yet he characterises this reason as not relevant to his decision to stop going to fast food restaurants (“that’s actually a conscious decision that isn’t related to the fact that I don’t like these things”: lines 4-6). In the next two extracts, a different justification is employed for not eating at fast food restaurants. In these extracts both speakers assert that fast food places do not offer value for money.

#### Extract 7 - R3II, pp.02

- |   |    |  |
|---|----|--|
| 1 | I: | What about MacDonalds (.) things like that |
| 2 | R: | (.) wouldn't touch them                    |
| 3 | I: | (.8) no                                    |
| 4 | R: | (1) wouldn't touch them                    |
| 5 | I: | (.8) have you ever been                    |

6        R:        (.4) aye I've been and I think it's (.4) pathetic for what you pay (.6)  
 7                compared to say eating more in places like Littlewoods and places  
 8                like that (.4) where you can have a decent (.) like a traditional (.4)  
 9                dinner (.2) kids eat free (1) and then you go in MacDonalds and  
 10               they're eating these little (.2) skinny chips (.2) stick chip things (.4)  
 11               and beef burgers(.) just rubbish aren't they.

Extract 8 - R8II, pp,02.

1        I:        Does that kind of eating out (.) in sort of fast food places (.4)  
 2                appeal to you  
 3        R:        (.2) naa not really (.) I mean (.4) it's kind of err (.) it's probably a  
 4                snobbery thing (.4) you know (.) apart from anything (.6) I just  
 5                don't like to think of myself as the kind of person that goes to  
 6                MacDonalds (.8) and I don't (3) I always think it's kind of wasteful  
 7                (.) cos you spend so much and you get so little (.2) whereas even if  
 8                you go to like a really manky Glasgow chippy you still get (.4) like  
 9                a good fish supper (.4) I mean when I say good I mean it's big I  
 10              don't mean (.6) nice (.) it might not be nice..

In extract 7, on line 6 the speaker states “I think it’s pathetic for what you pay”. Similarly in extract 8 the speaker says “ I always think it’s kind of wasteful (.) cos you spend so much and you get so little” (line 7). Both these utterances propose that fast food restaurants do not offer value for money. In extract 8 the basis of this assessment is formulated as the quantity of food supplied for in relation to its considerable cost. In extract 7, the speaker simply characterises the food as “pathetic” to similar effect.

In both extracts the speakers also develop a contrast between the food purchased within a fast food restaurant and an alternative means of eating out. In doing so they accentuate the claim that fast food does not offer value for money. In extract 7, the respondent suggests that fast food places do not seem good value for money when compared with restaurants such as Littlewoods (“compared to say eating more in places like Littlewoods and places like that”: line 7-8). He subsequently describes two features of such restaurants to stress the value that they offer. The first of these is the food they provide (“a decent..like a traditional dinner”: lines 8-9). The second is that they allow children to eat for free (line 9). By subsequently formulating the food consumed in fast food restaurants as insubstantial (“these little skinny chips (.2) stick chip things (.4) and beef burgers”: lines 10-11) and of low quality (“just

rubbish aren't they": line 16), the speaker warrants his claim that fast food offers less value for money.

In extract 8 the speaker develops a contrast between fast food restaurants and another outlet in relation to the *quantity* of food supplied. On lines 7 to 10 he produces an example of a fried food outlet that would supply a "good fish supper" (line 9). He subsequently defines good as large ("when I say good I mean it's big": line 9). Implicitly, the larger amount of food that is contained within this fish supper suggests it is better value for money (as a result of his prior assertion that fast food outlets provide a small amount of food for high cost). Moreover, the description produced of the fried food outlet ("a really manky Glasgow chippy": line 8) accentuates its lack of appeal (by use of the phrase "really manky"). This description works to stress the poor value of fast food - as food bought in even an unappealing outlet is implicitly characterised as better value for money. Note here that this speaker does, however, make relevant his recognition that the quality of food bought in such an outlet may be poor ("I don't mean nice (.) it might not be nice": lines 10-11) In doing so, he counters any potential contestation of his claim - that they offer better value - on the basis of the poor quality of the food.

In extract 9, I will examine a different kind of justification for not going to fast food restaurants. This extract is part of the account I considered as extract 8. In the following analysis, however, I will examine how this speaker characterises going to MacDonalds as a feature of self.

Extract 9 - R8II, pp,02.

- |   |    |  |
|---|----|--|
| 1 | I: | Does that kind of eating out (.) in sort of fast food places (.4)        |
| 2 |    | appeal to you  |
| 3 | R: | (.2) naa not really (.) I mean (.4) it's kind of err (.) it's probably a |
| 4 |    | snobbery thing (.4) you know (.) apart from anything (.6) I just         |
| 5 |    | don't like to think of myself as the kind of person that goes to         |
| 6 |    | MacDonalds (.8) and I don't (3) I always think it's kind of wasteful.    |

On lines 4 to 5 the speaker states “I just don’t like to think of myself as the kind of person that goes to MacDonalds”. This utterance implicitly formulates going to MacDonalds as a feature of self - a feature that is not considered desirable by the speaker. It is interesting to note here that the speaker characterises the basis of this lack of desire as snobbery (“it’s probably a snobbery thing”: lines 3-4). To characterise an assessment as ‘snobbery’ implies it is a form of judgement undertaken on the basis of social rank. Common-sensically, such a basis is not generally considered a legitimate or reasonable means for action. Consequently, the potentially contentious reasoning for the claim that he doesn’t go to MacDonalds because he does wish to be considered as the kind of person that does, is recognised and its legitimacy minimised.

In the extracts I have examined so far, the speakers have all denied that they generally go to fast food restaurants. In the final extract of the analysis, I will examine, by contrast, the way in which a speaker produces the claim that he does go. In response to the question, the speaker states “yea::h the boys love it” (line 2). This utterance implicitly formulates the reason for his eating at fast food restaurants as the pleasure derived from doing so by his children. Yet, as the account unfolds, the speaker produces a second reason as to why he buys food from Burger King.

#### Extract 10 - DP2, p.09

- |    |    |   |
|----|----|---|
| 1  | I: | Do you ever go to er::r places like MacDonalds or Burger King           |
| 2  | R: | (.) yea::h the boys love it (.6) we::e (.) we had somebody came         |
| 3  |    | round the doors (.6) about six months ago and they were selling (.)     |
| 4  |    | book (.) books of tickets (.2) and what it was that this book of        |
| 5  |    | tickets cost ten pounds and it claimed that yo::r (.) you could (.)     |
| 6  |    | save a hundred and fifty pounds at Burger King (.) and                  |
| 7  |    | what it was is a book of tickets (.2) one side was a::a like a BK       |
| 8  |    | flavour megameal and the other (.) there was a perforation there        |
| 9  |    | and the other ticket was exactly the same (.) so you got two for the    |
| 10 |    | price of one (.2) in other words our bills were halved immediately      |
| 11 |    | (.4) so when we bought a BK flavour megameal (.2) we would er::r        |
| 12 |    | (.) we would present this ticket and only get charged for one of        |
| 13 |    | them (.) so you get two meals and only have charged for one and         |
| 14 |    | (.4) I thought och there must be some (.) there must be some con in     |
| 15 |    | this in fact there isn't (.6) so er::r we've got this booklet an:nd the |

16 boys love going to Burger King (.4) so we go up and (.2) I mean it  
 17 hardly costs us anything because we've got this booklet (.) it costs  
 18 us a tenner (.4) I mean we've made up (.) we've made up that price  
 19 (.4) the price of that tenfold (.2) it's either (.4) Burger King are  
 20 making a loss over it or::r (.) the markup on food in there must be  
 21 absolutely astronomical but er::r yeah quite like it (.2) I wouldn't  
 22 like (.) I don't like going up too often (.4) cos I feel it's quite high  
 23 calorie sugar stuff (.4) but the boys love it..

On lines 2 to 21 the speaker provides a detailed description of a money saving booklet that he purchased in order reduce the cost of buying food from Burger King. In developing this description, he stresses both the amount of money this booklet has saved him (e.g. “our bills were halved immediately”: line 10), and the low cost of eating at Burger King with this saving coupon (e.g. “I mean it hardly costs us anything cos we’ve got this booklet”: lines 16-17). Moreover, the speaker substantiates this latter claim by speculating upon how Burger King provides food as such a low cost (“it’s either Burger King are making a loss over it...or the mark-up on food in there is absolutely astronomical”: lines 19-21).

By highlighting in this way the money he has saved and the low cost of eating at Burger King, the speaker characterises this restaurant as good value. The implication arising from this is that the low cost is an additional reason for his going to such outlets. However, note that on lines 22 to 23, the speaker asserts that he doesn’t eat at fast food restaurants on an overly regular basis - a potential supposition that may arise in connection with his claims regarding their cost and his children’s enjoyment of them. The reason he gives for such restraint is the nature of the food as highly sugared and calorific.

#### 6.4 Discussion

In this analysis the most significant action that is performed by speakers is the denial that they eat at fast food outlets. In extracts 1 to 5, for example, each of the respondents produce a negative response to a question asking if they go to such places. These responses are mainly



direct (e.g. “no”: extract 1) and emphatic in nature (e.g. “not if I can help it: extract 5) - consequently stressing that places like MacDonalds were not patronised.

By rejecting fast food restaurants in this way, the speakers design their accounts in a manner that seems sensitive to potentially negative inferences that may arise in connection with their going. One reason for this may be the nature of the food that is available. Academic understandings have accentuated the detrimental effects upon health of artificial, high fat and sugar products of the sort available as fast food (e.g. Scottish Office, 1993). Consequently, going to restaurants in order to buy such food may result in the implication that issues of health are not considered as relevant. In extract 10 the speaker orientates toward, and rejects, this potential implication in connection with his claim that he does go. In this extract the respondent asserts that that he does not go to fast food restaurants “too often” as a consequence of the food being highly calorific and highly sugared.

There are many other notions that have been constructed as reasons for not going to fast food outlets by existing knowledges of food. For example, a common construction is that fast food operations have a detrimental effect on the environment. There are a number of issues that are highlighted in relation to this, such as the production and disposal of packaging materials and the deforestation of former rainforest land in order to graze cattle (McSpotlight, 1997). Knowledges stressing the negative environmental impact of fast food may make it difficult to sustain a claim that such restaurants are patronised - as such a claim may imply a lack of ecological awareness or interest. In extract 6 the speaker certainly drew upon notions of the environment as a means of justifying his decision to stop going to fast food places. In this extract, he claims to have acted upon information that companies such as MacDonalds were contributing to the problems in South America due to their requirement for beef cattle.

Another reason produced by speakers as a basis for not going to fast food restaurants is the nature of the products that are sold in such outlets. In extracts 7 and 8 the speakers assert that

fast food offers poor value for money, characterising the costs as high (extract 8) and the food as of poor quality (extract 7) and insubstantial (extracts 7 and 8). In these extracts, the speakers develop a contrast to other forms of eating food out of the home as a means of stressing the comparative lack of value offered by fast food. For example, in extract 7 the speaker asserts that stores such as Littlewoods offer better value as a consequence of the food they provide (a traditional dinner) and the manner in which they allow children to eat for free.

By constructing fast food as poor value in this way, the speakers respondents warrant their claim that they do not go to such restaurants. Moreover, the construction that they produce is not one that is resonated within many academic knowledges of fast food - which tend, instead, to stress the principle of good value as a common basis for fast food consumption (e.g. Ritzer, 1993). Certainly, the construction of fast food as good value for money is also characterised as a reason for going to such restaurants in these accounts (extract 10). However, the contrast here highlights the variable and contradictory nature of the linguistic resources culturally available in relation to fast food - a diversity that is not generally a general feature of the academic understandings that have been produced.

As I have considered, the speakers generally design their accounts to deny going to fast food restaurants. In doing so they seem to display a sensitivity to possible negative implications that may arise from a state of affairs in which such restaurants are patronised. Such implications may relate to culturally available constructions of fast food as un-healthy, un-ethical and potentially lacking in value - all constructions that are orientated toward and resonated within the extracts. In addition to constructions such as these, within these extracts, a couple of respondents seemed sensitive to implications that the consumption of fast food may reflect negatively on self. In extract 9 the participant asserts that he does not go to MacDonalds on the basis that he does wish to consider himself as the kind of person who does. This assertion implicitly draws upon the understanding that dining out is in some way related to identity (e.g. Finkelstein, 1989), and orientates toward potentially negative

implications regarding self that may arise as a consequence of being a fast food patron. One such implication may be related to the construction of fast food as an standardised exercise that requires only mechanical adherence, by customers, to a set of simplistic principles and procedures (e.g. Ritzer, 1993). To go to fast food places may thus imply a lack of critical thought or even intelligence.

In extract 10, also, the speaker seems to display a sensitivity to possible negative inferences regarding self that arise from the claim that he goes to fast food restaurants. In this extract, the respondent replies to the question by making reference to his children's enjoyment ("Yea::h the boys love it"). By characterising the basis of his eating fast food in this way, the speaker designs his claim to reject any potential implications that he goes for reasons connected with self: reasons that may have negative implications.

A final point to note in relation to this analysis regards the implicit acknowledgement by speakers of the contentious and contestable nature of the claims they are making - an acknowledgement that again demonstrates the complex and contradictory nature of the culturally available resources relating to fast food. In extract 9, for example, the respondent characterises the claim that he does not wish to be considered as a MacDonalds person as "probably a snobbery thing". In producing this characterisation he implicitly demonstrates his awareness of contentious nature of such a claim and thus its potential formulation as an unreasonable basis for action. Similarly, in extract 6, the speaker makes reference to the potentially interested nature of the information upon which he based his decision to stop going to fast food restaurants. In doing so, he implicitly formulates this information as contestable - and thus potential lack of robustness.

## 6.5 Conclusion

The speakers in these extracts generally emphatically deny going to fast food places. This perhaps suggests a sensitivity toward negative inferences that may arise in connection with going. A number of different reasons for not eating at fast food restaurants are provided by speakers - highlighting the complexity of the cultural meanings pertaining to this topic. Moreover, the contestable nature of the explanations produced is implicitly acknowledged by a number of respondents.

## **CHAPTER SEVEN**

## 7.0 Conclusions

In this study I have examined the discursive actions performed by men when talking about food. In undertaking this examination, I have considered the kinds of discursive constructions that have been produced, and the culturally available but tacit 'reasoning procedures' (Widdicombe, 1993) that seem to inform the selection of particular terms, phrases and statements. My analysis has been concerned with the discursive practices of participants in talk, and not any cognitive or social reality to which their accounts may pertain.

In the final chapter of this study I will first consider some of the key observations that have emerged from my analysis and then reflect in some depth upon the nature of the analytic methodology I have employed. I will consider the tensions between the different styles of discursive research that constitute the approach I have taken and demonstrate how these have arisen out of the meshing two, potentially contradictory, analytic styles. By considering issues of validity and reflexivity in relation to my approach, I will propose that the attempt to 'hybridise' analytic styles has enabled me to fulfil my research aims in a manner that is both rigorous and scholarly. Finally, I will move on to consider ways in which this research could be developed and examine how alternative forms of discursive analysis may be employed to progress work in this area.

### 7.1 The applied dimension

In undertaking research on such a central topic as food, the observations I have made are of relevance to a number of applied fields. In considering some of my key observations in relation to such fields, I am able to demonstrate the significant contribution to knowledge that this work offers. One field of interest is that of health promotion.

The links between food and health have been stressed by many knowledges of food. Prior research has characterised men, in particular, as less inclined to eat healthily or consider issues of health when making food choices (Anderson and Hunt, 1992). For health promoters, an understanding of the kinds of 'reasoning procedures' that may be culturally available and employed by men will facilitate the development of appropriate and effective healthy eating campaigns. There are a number of analytic observations emerging from this research that are therefore of relevance. A number of these pertain to men's talk about salad.

Salad has generally been constructed by knowledges of food as a substance avoided or disliked by men. One reason for this is that it takes the form of a light food that is unfulfilling and insubstantial. Salad is also commonly associated with notions of femininity: a link that is given added impetus by the common assumption that raw vegetable consumption aids weight loss and thus assists women in their endeavours to achieve a 'slim' body (Lupton, 1996). Yet salad is a foodstuff that is extremely healthy and thus of considerable value in preventing disease. An increase in the consumption of salad by men may thus lead to a reduction in the prevalence of specific health conditions

In my analysis of men's talk about salad, I note that the respondents seem to stress the substantial nature of the salad they consume. In extracts 1 and 2, for example, both speakers characterise salad as eaten with something else, such as meat. Additionally, the respondent in extract 1 stresses the ample nature of the salad prepared for him by producing a list of its various components: an accentuation that is also effected via different means in extract 3. By highlighting the ample nature of the meals containing salad that they eat, the speakers reject any inferences that they eat insubstantially - inferences that may arise in connection with the claim that salad (as a light food) is actually consumed.

From a health promotion point of view, what is useful about this general observation regarding substance is that it highlights a specific way of reasoning that may be worked with. For instance, if a healthy eating campaign is devised to promote salad to men, the images and messages it provides may utilise the notion of substance by accentuating the filling nature of a large and varied salad or by glossing extra bulky meals as those containing salad amongst other items. This latter strategy could be employed as a means of re-defining popular meals to contain salad - in the manner of the meal described by the respondent in extract 3 (fish with chips and salad). The advantage of these kinds of messages and actions would be the common-sense construction of salad as insubstantial and unfulfilling may be contested and this potential reason for avoidance undermined.

A second observation that may be of interest to health promoters pertains to men's talk about weight. The notion of weight being problematic is commonly associated with women (Charles and Kerr, 1988). However epidemiological studies suggest that a large proportion of men are overweight and over one tenth of the male population may be considered clinically obese (Scottish Office, 1993). As obesity is linked to a number of physical problems such as heart disease and a variety of cancers, health promoters are attempting to encourage weight loss amongst those men in the population whose risk of encountering such problems is increased.

In my analysis I note that a number of speakers produce accounts designed to reject the assertion that their weight is a basis for concern. In extracts 3 and 4 (talk about weight) for example, respondents deny feeling *concerned* about their weight acknowledging in contrast that it is a *consideration*. In rejecting weight as a concern, respondents employ a number of rhetorical techniques and descriptive strategies. For example, one particular descriptive strategy employed by a number of speakers when talking about weight (extracts 5 to 7) involves the formulation of a potential basis for a concern about weight - a basis which is rejected as not relevant in the present circumstances (a similar strategy



can also be observed in extract 2 of men's talk about slimming). For health promoters, an awareness of this kind of descriptive strategy offers a number of opportunities. In particular, the propositions and justifications it contains may be challenged explicitly in promotional materials. For instance the premise of conditionality with regards to a concern about weight may be directly contested. Health promotion materials may characterise the idea of deferring a concern about weight is common amongst those who become obese and encounter chronic/terminal health problems (i.e. 'it's too late to worry now' etc.). This would gloss the deferral of a concern about weight as foolhardy, and thus formulate such an action in negative terms.

While health promoters may be able to capitalise upon the observations made with regards to men's talk about weight, a significant note of caution must be exercised with regards to the degree of variation manifest within the accounts. In those extracts that I examined, six different formulations of weight becoming a problem were noted. Such variability illustrates the complexity of the culturally available linguistic resources that constitute 'common-sense' with regards to weight - a complexity that must be recognised and accounted for in the design of promotional campaigns, intervention strategies and, indeed, further research. To talk simply of a 'weight problem' or selectively refer to a specific formulation (e.g. weight exceeding an absolute level in relation to height) in academic or lay texts/materials negates the complexity of the meanings that may be relevant. Consequently, the effectiveness of any materials linking weight and health may be dependent upon their addressing the variable, and potentially contradictory, constructions that are culturally available.

I have so far examined a number of significant observations emerging from my analysis that are of direct relevance to health promoters. Another observation that may be of interest to this community, in addition to other stakeholders such as the food industry, pertains to men's talk about shopping. In the accounts that were produced, a number of

respondents describe a considerable degree of involvement in shopping yet construct their accounts in a manner designed to minimise the level of responsibility for purchase decisions that is attributed to self. In extract 6 of men's talk about shopping, for example, the respondent states that he does the bulk of the shopping, but uses a list prepared by his wife to determine what goods to purchase. This discursive action suggests that the level of household responsibility attributed to self may be of concern: an observation that has implications for those wishing to influence male shopping practices.

On the basis of existing consumer research, men have been constructed as playing an increasingly significant role in shopping (Lang *et al.*, 1996). On the basis of such research it may appear appropriate to target messages regarding which foods to purchase for the household (e.g. healthier products) towards men as well as women. Yet, such a course of action may result in messages being designed on the basis of an inferred responsibility for the domestic environment - an inference that may be problematic to men. A more effective strategy, by contrast, may be to work with the notion of domestic responsibility and develop promotional materials that mesh with the construction of the household as a domain for which men do not generally assume control. For example, promoters may make a distinction between products required for the household and those that may be purchased in addition, while actually undertaking the shopping. The way in which household needs (e.g. for cereal) that have been identified by another party (e.g. a female partner) may be fulfilled could offer opportunities for producers and retailers to influence men's purchasing practices (e.g. influencing the *kind* of cereal purchased). More specifically, in a number of extracts regarding shopping (e.g. extracts 6-8) respondents made reference to the shopping list written by their wife as a way, I suggested, of stressing their lack of responsibility for ascertaining household needs. The notion of the shopping list itself may, therefore, be used explicitly in promotional materials as a means of encouraging men to buy specific products to meet general household needs identified on the shopping list by the responsible partner.

While I have so far considered a number of observations emerging from my analysis that may be of applied relevance, there are two important points to note in relation to these. The first of these is that the kinds of culturally available resources and reasoning procedures displayed in the accounts presented in this thesis cannot be considered as definitive. They cannot be considered as the primary or only resources available to men in constituting 'food'. This must be borne in mind by those developing promotional campaigns on the basis of the results of this research. Yet the observations I have made do offer a significant contribution to knowledge in that they elucidate the nature of a selection of reasoning procedures, descriptive strategies, claims and formulations that are produced by number of men when talking about food. This elucidation may be considered of direct and applied relevance to health and commercial concerns.

My second point regards the relationship between talk and social practice. As I argued in chapter 1, a discursive analysis of the construction of accounts does not provide a basis for any 'realist' claims pertaining to social practices. However, I also argued that interpretative resources are enmeshed with material practices, for it is through such resources that material practices are invested with meaning and thus constituted (Foucault, 1972). The material and linguistic realms are thus inherently interlinked. Moreover, as Shotter (1984) has argued, language and practice are perhaps best viewed as constituting one another mutually. This relationship is conceived of in terms of a material reality within which linguistic practices are grounded, and those linguistic rules and conventions through which such a reality is shaped. The point here is that the kinds of reasoning procedures employed by men in talk about food may also be those that provide the basis for food practices: such as who in the household actually does the cooking or what particular foods to select for dinner. However, I make no claim regarding specific food practices on the basis of the discursive analysis I have undertaken.

## 7.2 Gender as a resource

Moving on from a practical orientation, there are issues that have emerged from my analysis that may be linked to other analytic concerns: such as a sustained interest in the ways gender relations are produced and reproduced in talk about food. Within the accounts examined, gender is a resource that is employed in the construction of specific justifications and claims. Although explicit gender categorisations or identities (e.g. 'as a man') were rarely deployed, a number of commonsensical constructions relating to gender were drawn upon implicitly. One way, for example, in which specific claims were accomplished and warranted was through the use of gender based contrasts.

In my analysis of men's talk about sweets I noted that two respondents develop contrasts between their own consumption practices and the practices of their wives. In extract 8 the respondent produces a description of his wife's consumption of chocolate, when available, as unrestrained and excessive. In contrast to this he formulates his own approach in such circumstances as nonchalant, involving a moderate level of intake and subsequent lack of desire to consume additional quantities. Similarly, in extract 9, the respondent describes his wife's active purchase of sweets and biscuits as a contrast to his own reticence toward such foods.

As a rhetorical technique, a contrast can work to produce, or warrant, a specific claim by identifying and rejecting a threatening alternative (Smith, 1978). In the two extracts discussed above, both speakers employ a gender based contrast to accentuate their nonchalance toward sweets and biscuits by undermining the common-sense alternative

(i.e. that sweets and biscuits are desired and consumed readily). This alternative arises from the close link between sweet food and the notion of pleasure. By formulating the approach of their wives as unrestrained in contrast to their own, the speakers make implicit use of gender differences in relation to sweet food (James, 1992) to make their claim of nonchalance seem reasonable. The links between sweet food and notions of femininity that are common-sense enable such a claim to be developed in an effective manner.

The construction of women as having an often unrestrained, but problematic, relationship to chocolate specifically is explicitly articulated within another gender based contrast. In extract 9 of men's talk about guilt the speaker refers to adverts designed to appeal to women on the basis of an approach which regards chocolate as both naughty but nice. In stating this reasoning is not one he would employ, the respondent works up a contrast between his approach and that of women - a contrast that is dependent upon specific differential gender categories and their relation to food.

A second way in which gender features as an implicit resource drawn upon in the accounts relates to the notion of role. In a number of extracts, speakers produced claims and justifications that employ the common-sense construction of men and women playing different roles within the household. Such a construction is resonated strongly in a number of studies of lay explanations relating to food (e.g. Charles and Kerr, 1988). In my examination of men's talk, there are a considerable number of observable instances where speakers characterise the role of their female partner in accordance with a culturally ascribed female role of which the provision of food is an integral part. For example, in talk about salads, the respondent in extract 2 makes reference to the salads made by his wife. By employing the term 'wife' in this context, the notion of gender-role is implicitly made relevant - a notion that similarly meshes with his assertion that it is she who provides the food. Similarly, in talk about cooking and shopping a number of

respondents employed gender roles as a means of characterising and justifying their often minimal involvement in tasks that may imply a level of responsibility for the domestic environment.

In extract 5 of men's talk about shopping, for example, the speaker initially asserts that his wife does the shopping. After the nature of his own involvement is made relevant, the respondent then suggests that he assists her in doing so. Following these statements, a justification of this state of affairs is provided that formulates his wife as possessing the knowledge required to do the shopping as a result of her responsibility to look after the household environment. It is thus his wife's responsibility for the domestic context that is employed as a justification for a state of affairs (i.e. her doing the shopping) that could, in some senses, be considered as inequitable. By making reference to his wife's responsibilities, the justification produced by the speaker draws implicitly upon the common-sense construction of gender roles and a distribution of labour within the household.

This construction is resonated within a number of other accounts. In extracts 1 to 3 of men's talk about cooking, respondents assert directly that their wives undertake this task. The directness of such an assertion, as I observed in the analysis, works to formulate the state of affairs described as one that is to be expected - an expectation that relates directly to the construction of the female as responsible for the household. The common construction of differential gender roles is thus implicated in the formulation of their assertions as an un-problematic, factual representation of a 'normal' domestic set up.

### 7.3 Dilemmatic aspects of talk about food.

In addition to the analytic themes emerging directly from my analysis, there are a number of other observations that may be made with regards to men's talk about food. One of

these is way in which many of the accounts that were produced seemed to draw upon contradictory cultural resources as they unfolded. Such contradiction can be related to theoretical work on the processes of social argumentation and rhetoric. Billig *et al.* (1988) have argued that the social knowledges constituting everyday reasoning procedures (or 'common-sense') are contradictory in nature. As a consequence of this, they suggest, social thought is dilemmatic and may best be considered as a form of argumentation. The 'common-sense' of a particular culture is made up of contrary themes - themes that constitute the resources through which people think and argue. Furthermore, it is the contradictory nature of such themes that *enable* people to reason and consider particular topics and issues. A singular value would require no judgement or reasoning when applied to specific social phenomena.

As 'common-sense' is composed of contrary themes, social dilemmas emerge when a choice or judgement is presented. These dilemmas emerge when consideration is made of a social issue about which a number of contradictory cultural themes each may offer the 'seeds' (Billig *et al.*, 1988) of a reasonable position. For example, Billig (1987) cites two contrary common-sense beliefs represented in the assertions 'out of sight out of mind' and 'absence makes the heart grow fonder' as a means of demonstrating the kind of social dilemma in considerations of such circumstances. As both assertions appear reasonable, the processes of reasoning with regards to absence – the topic to which these the underpinning themes refer - and any such dilemma must involve argumentation. Argumentation and rhetoric can thus be considered as a central feature of everyday thought and language use.

Within men's talk about food, the contrary nature of the 'common-sense' reasoning procedures pertaining to a particular topic can be observed on a number of occasions. Furthermore, the dilemmas these pose are worked through in a number of accounts produced and the rhetorical strategies employed. Some particularly striking examples are

manifest within talk about cooking and shopping. On a number of occasions, speakers provide accounts that make implicit (and explicit) reference to the competing 'common-sense' themes of women's responsibility for the household being an acceptable arrangement, and alternatively such a state of affairs being inequitable. This latter theme is a feature of a wider principle of individualism and thus commonly contrasted to notions of gender-based role categorisation (Billig *et al.*, 1988).

In men's talk about shopping a number of speakers develop the claim that their wife or female partner is *responsible* for ascertaining household needs (e.g. via writing a shopping list etc.). This claim draws upon the common-sense resource that looking after the house is an aspect of the female role. Yet, within these accounts, speakers also accentuated the degree to which they did play an active involvement in the task of shopping. By stressing their involvement in this way, respondents seemed to orientate toward the contrary theme of individualism and undermine any inferences of inequity or unfairness arising in accordance with the claim that it is their partner whom decides what is bought. This contradiction is particularly overt in extract 5 of men's talk about shopping. In this extract the speaker first claims that his wife does the shopping, and then that he assists. By subsequently treating this state of affairs as an accountable matter and producing a justification that glosses a division of labour as itself equitable, the contradiction between the themes of female responsibility and individualism is explicitly worked through.

A similar contradiction provides the basis for a number of accounts pertaining to cooking. For example, in extract 3 of this analysis the respondent states directly and unaccountably that his wife does the cooking all the time: thus drawing implicitly upon the common sense construction of a 'normal' domestic set-up whereby the female does all the cooking and other household duties. Yet, when I repeat this assertion within the interview the speaker produces a subsequent statement that implicitly undermines any



inferences that he does nothing (i.e. by saying 'as far as cooking is concerned all the time'). Essentially, he infers that he performs other tasks *within the household*. The speaker therefore upholds the principle of individual responsibility whereby individuals play fair and assume an equal level of responsibility as their partner. Yet, this principle runs contrary to the acceptability of a state of affairs in which a wife does *all* the household duties in accordance with the female role. Consequently, this account may be considered contradictory in the general common-sense themes it upholds.

While social dilemmas can be observed in men's talk about cooking and shopping, they can also be noted in relation to other topics. In their talk about meat, for example, a number of number of respondents produced accounts that seemed to draw upon two themes of meat as a physical requirement and meat as a non-essential feature of diet. These themes constitute contrary common-sense resources and therefore present a social dilemma to those considering meat in relation to the notion of need. In extract 8, for example, the respondent states that he consumes meat at the present time because of the ill health he encountered when fully vegetarian. Yet, as this account progresses, the speaker also goes on to downplay the significance of meat by suggesting that he doesn't regard it as adding a huge amount to his life. By downplaying the significance of meat in this way, the speaker draws upon the common-sense construction of meat as not central to life, or even of considerable value. This rhetorical move seems designed to counter any potentially undermining objections to his claim of a need for meat arising from the contrary common-sense construction of meat as not-essential or important. The two competing themes of meat as a physical requirement and meat as not essential or important would thus seem to provide the argumentative basis for this account - a basis that is manifest in the somewhat contradictory nature of the claims that are made.

#### 7.4 Accountability in talk about food

As I have considered, the contrary nature of the culturally available linguistic resources that constitute 'common-sense' results inevitably in the process of argumentation. Accounts produced by respondents can therefore be examined for those common-sense resources that constitute the dilemmatic basis of the issues at hand, in addition to the specific contradictions that emerge as speakers deal with competing social knowledges and reasoning procedures. Contradiction and variation were certainly observed with a number of the accounts produced by respondents in this research. Yet it is not sufficient to simply ascribe such variation to competing common-sense notions at a general level. The processes of argumentation in formulating an account are inherently linked to a respondent's own 'stake' in the descriptions that are produced. In relation to men's talk about food (in which the men are generally discussing their own practices) participants have a stake in both the events and actions that are being described (e.g. cooking) in addition to the descriptions that they themselves are producing in their talk. Consequently, notions of responsibility and accountability are relevant on both these levels.

To illustrate some of the ways in which speakers address issues of accountability I will provide some examples drawn from the analysis. I will first focus upon the accountability for a claim that is made. In my examination of talk about sweets the respondent in extract 8 develops a contrast between his own and his partner's approach to chocolate as a means of accentuating his nonchalance. Yet in producing this claim, he cites his wife's acknowledgement of his lack of interest in chocolate. In using 'footing' (Goffman, 1979) in this way, the speaker orientates toward possible inferences regarding his personal interest in producing, and his thus accountability for, such an assertion - the validity of which is contentious bearing in mind the common-sense construction of chocolate as a tempting and enjoyable foodstuff. By citing the comments of his wife, it is her testimony as a 'disinterested' but reliable witness that works to formulate his claim

as robust. Such robustness in turn maintains his identity as an honest purveyor of the facts.

The speakers also address notions of accountability in relation to the practices described within these accounts. In men's talk about sweets, for example, the basis for his desiring and eating sweets is characterised by the respondent in extract 5 as biological - arising as a craving after exercise. By formulating the reason for his sweet consumption in such terms, the speaker attributes this act to factors beyond his rational and agentic control. His level of personal culpability for eating sweets is thus minimised.

A denial of culpability for particular state of affairs can also be observed in extract 6 men's talk about cooking. In this extract the speaker initially asserts that he would never cook a meal when his wife is present within the household. This is subsequently treated as an accountable matter and the reasoning behind such a scenario explicated in terms of his wife's *refusal* to allow him to enter the kitchen. The basis for attributing the culpability for his lack of involvement in cooking to his wife may be the potentially negative implications regarding self (such as that he is being unfair) that could arise in relation to such a state of affairs. It is thus issues of identity that may be at stake: issues that motivate an orientation toward his own accountability. In this sense, it is possible to consider a participant's attributions within accounts regarding self as inherently linked to the processes of identity management (Edwards and Potter, 1992).

As claims are produced within accounts as they unfold, different identity concerns may become relevant as various competing social knowledges are drawn upon. The process of managing accountability, and therefore identity, are a feature of social argumentation and the production of accounts. As I have suggested, accountability and identity concerns operate in relation to the actions described within an account but also in terms of the

production of the account itself. Variability and contradiction must therefore be viewed as related to these identity concerns operating upon both levels of accountability.

### 7.5 Common sense and academic knowledges

In linking my analysis of men's talk to contrary common-sense knowledges, I have developed a distinction between such and those contained within academic knowledge pertaining to food. In making this distinction I do not wish to imply that these forms of understanding should be considered as discrete from one another. These knowledges share a complex relationship the fundamental tenets of which it is important to explicate.

The relationship between academic understandings and everyday concepts has been given a considerable amount of attention within sociological and social psychological literatures. Moscovici (1981) for example, has argued that scientific conceptualisations of particular phenomena have become an integral feature of 'western' common-sense. A particular example he provides is that of psychoanalysis (Moscovici, 1976). Psychoanalytic concepts such as the existence of an 'unconscious' have become key features of common-sensical constructions of selfhood. Moscovici argues that abstract concepts are not transposed directly from scientific or academic contexts into resources to be drawn upon in everyday thought. Instead, it is specific, or what he terms 'social', representations of such concepts that become translated into everyday discourse. One means through which scientific concepts and ideas are represented socially is through simplified media discussion (Widdicombe and Woofitt, 1995). This means is particularly relevant, as I have considered, to links between food and health. Other ways include the creation of institutional structures and practices on the basis of scientific concepts. It is through such structures and practices that particular conditions may be constituted socially. For example, certain forms of irregular eating have been constituted as disordered, defined in medical terms, and institutionalised within medical structures

(Hepworth and Griffin, 1990). The existence and nature of such disorders has consequentially become common-sense, as their medical status becomes assimilated into everyday terms.

While scientific and academic knowledge may become assimilated, in transformed and simplified terms, within common-sense, the relationship between these forms of understanding is bi-directional. The terms of common-sense itself may provide the basis for academic concepts and theories (Billig *et al.*, 1988). This process of transformation can take a number of forms, both explicit and implicit. One of the most common explicit forms is manifest within 'inductive' methodologies such as Grounded Theory (Glaser and Strauss, 1967). These methodologies attempt to develop theory on the basis of concepts and terms that are produced within lay explanations. Moreover, as Billig (1981) has demonstrated in his analysis of racism, the mutual relationship between academic and lay explanation often leads to a continual process whereby scientific concepts are transformed into everyday understandings which are then re-transformed and incorporated back into academic theory.

This process of re-transformation is closely linked to more implicit ways in which common-sense knowledge provides the basis for academic theorising. As well as developing academic theories and knowledge pertaining to a particular state of affairs, researchers are human beings who live within a culture constructing the world in common-sense terms. Consequently, they have access to both academic and common-sense knowledge relating to a phenomenon. This can lead to dilemmas in terms of managing the day to day activities that mesh with common-sense understandings, while confronting potentially contradictory academic knowledges (Billig *et al.*, 1988). It can also lead to common-sense resources being employed as an implicit basis for academic theorising and research. For example, the kinds of common-sense constructions culturally available with regards to a certain issue may provide the basis for the way in

which that issue is formulated and addressed in scientific terms. Ogden (1997) develops this point by arguing that theoretical and everyday understandings are mutually constructive - an argument that undermines the privileging of one form of knowledge over another and renders the boundary between 'expert' and common-sense accounts permeable. Consequently, the very distinction between academic and common-sense knowledge must be considered as a construct produced in various contexts by means of particular discursive strategies.

I have so far in this chapter reflected on the results of the study and discussed some of the issues relating to my observations and analysis. There is an equally pressing requirement in any concluding discussion to reflect upon the methodology through which any results have been produced. In this research on men's talk about food, such reflection takes on added significance as a consequence of the different analytic styles that are evident in the approach I have taken.

#### 7.6 Methodological reflections: a hybridised analysis

My aim in this research was to examine how men themselves construct accounts of food, the reasoning procedures they employ and the kinds of common-sense cultural resources that seem to inform the accounts that are produced. My approach, therefore, was to examine participants discursive actions in men's talk about specific aspects of food. Yet such a hybridised approach encompasses a number of tensions. It incorporates two specific analytic exercises. The first of these exercises is a focus upon the participants uses of language at a local level. This focus is based upon the observations contained within Edwards and Potter's (1992) Model of Discursive Action, and relies upon an in-depth examination of the construction of accounts. Such an approach to accounts takes as its starting point the categories produced and worked up in talk by participants. However, in employing the pre-defined analytic categories of 'men' and specific aspects of 'food',

the research may also be considered as a 'top-down' exercise relying upon my analytic interest in the discursive practices of men in relation to specific aspects of food. In contrast to a focus upon participants' actions, this second analytic style is embedded within a discursive tradition whereby analysts play a more formative analytic role. This role is a consequence of their interest in particular, pre-defined substantive topics and the content of the culturally available linguistic resources that pertain to these.

The key tension that arises between these two forms of analytic styles relates to the starting point of the analysis undertaken. In a focus upon participants' discursive practices, the researcher takes as his/her starting point some linguistic materials and examines these in terms of the concerns of participants. No prior categories or ethnographic particulars are imposed upon the data that is produced. In research that employs a more global, top down approach (e.g. interpretative repertoire or post-structuralist discourse analysis), it is the interests and concerns of the analyst in focusing upon particular substantive concerns that is the starting point. In one sense it is possible to view these two starting points as mutually incompatible with one another. Yet, there are good reasons for drawing upon these two different analytic approaches to discourse in this research. As I considered in chapter one, the notion of a singular category 'men' may be considered problematic. However, such a category is stressed by existing academic knowledge of food as a significant determinant of food behaviour. Indeed, gender is a theme running through many common-sense understandings (Billig, 1991). Men and women are thus common-sensically and theoretically constructed as having a different relationship to food in a number of domains. Furthermore, the differences in this relationship have been cited as cause for concern on a number of dimensions. Politically, for example, feminist theorists have argued that women's often problematic relationship to food relates directly to their subordination within a patriarchal society. Health promoters too have highlighted men's food preferences as a factor in a number of

specific health problems for men themselves, and also the households in which their choices may prevail.

On the basis of the observation that gender is a significant issue in relation to food, I designed this research to examine the discursive practices of men. In doing so I specifically 'topicalised' men's talk about food as the focus of my analysis. Without imposing analytical categories in this way, I would quite simply have been unable to take 'men's' talk about food as a basis for research - for notions of gender or the topic of food would only become relevant if they emerged specifically from participants. Consequently, to recognise the cultural importance of gender with regards to food and undertake research on 'men' in this domain, avoiding imposing any such ethnographic characteristics upon participants was untenable. As a result of the kinds of substantive research questions I was asking, I was required, as an analyst, to impose my own analytic categories upon the research.

In imposing analytic categories upon any piece of talk it is possible, with regards to existing schools of analysis, that the discursive actions of participants will not be examined on the local level. Post-structuralist discourse analysts, for example, impose analytic categories on talk as a means of making broader, socio-political claims. However, as I have argued, such an approach ignores the kinds of categories respondents themselves may work up, the nature of the descriptive strategies they employ and the actions performed on the local level. Failing to examine these aspects of an account negates its *interactional* properties and thus downplays the functional and constructive nature of language itself.

To examine the kinds of reasoning procedures and constructions that may be culturally available to participants, it is essential to examine what respondents themselves do with language. As such an examination can only take place through a consideration of



accounts, the interactional concerns that are relevant to their production must be considered. Analysis should therefore consider the kinds of actions that are being performed in relation to the interactional business that is being attended as well as the nature of the cultural resources that are employed as the account unfolds. On the basis of this observation, my desire to examine the talk of 'men' about 'food' meshes on a practical level with my focus upon discursive action. This practical resolution of the tensions between these two analytic styles represents a departure from the starting point associated with work on a participant's actions. Pre-defined analytic categories are employed. Yet, it also represents a departure from the *methodological* approach commonly employed by discourse analysts interested in the nature and content of specific culturally available resources. As I considered in chapter two, analysts with either a post-structuralist or interpretative repertoire focus do not examine in detail the ways in which language is used by participants on the local level. Consequently, the hybrid version of discourse analysis I have employed in this study does not attempt to employ either a local or global analytic style in a conventional pure form, but has modified them both in different ways and to different extents to mesh more effectively. In undertaking such a modification, the tension between these two styles within my work is downplayed for I am not claiming to deploy either in essential form. However, as I have argued, the methodological approach I have taken is one that is broadly in line with the model of discursive action (Edwards and Potter, 1992). Consequently, the way this particular analytical style aligns with my imposition of analytic categories requires further exposition.

My analytic focus on 'men' may be seen as running contrary to my desire to focus upon participants' actions. Yet in examining the actions and concerns of participants in accounts when talking about food, it is not necessarily a requirement to adopt an analytic perspective that only considers actions in terms of issues 'topicalised' *explicitly* by respondents (in the manner proposed by conversation analysts such as Schegloff, 1972).

Many actions performed in talk are implicit: relying upon culturally available common-sensical understandings unexplicated interactionally. This is a point embedded within the model of discursive action. By drawing upon their own cultural knowledge, an analyst's reading of an account may be *deepened* and implicit themes identified. By employing their own cultural understandings, the analyst is able to provide an interpretative reading of an account (Wetherell and Potter, 1992) that is informed by those common-sense understandings to which the participants would seem to orientate - thus enabling important links to the social and political context to be developed (Gill, 1996).

In the approach to the analysis of participants actions outlined by Edwards and Potter (1992) and subsequently drawn heavily upon in this research, the analyst plays an interpretative role. However, within the analytic style to which the discourse action model relates, the interpretative role of the analyst is limited strictly to the analytic materials which are provided. Their scholarly skills and common-sense understandings are to be employed only in the analysis of the discursive actions that are performed by participants.

In my research on men's talk about food, however, the role of analyst is *extended* to encompass the formulation of research questions of relevance to a number of theoretical and substantive concerns. This extension subsequently involves the imposition of pre-defined analytic categories on the research and, as such, employs an approach that is commonly associated with a more global form of discursive analysis. My role as analyst is thus of paramount importance here in resolving the tension between the two analytic styles evident in the thesis. Both the analytic styles I have employed in this thesis rely, in various ways, upon the interpretative and scholarly skills of the analyst. Consequently, to view these two approaches as contradictory seems inappropriate. A more useful view is to regard these styles as simply according different levels of emphasis to the formulations

and interpretations of the analyst in the focus they adopt. If this latter view is adopted, the tension manifest within my analytic style arising from its hybrid nature is resolved. As I have argued, my analytical role is simply extended from that conventionally associated with a discursive action approach to one that is additionally formative in the substantive focus of the research.

### 7.7 Validity and reflexivity

In outlining the reasoning behind my approach to discourse in this research and accentuating my own analytical role, a number of questions may be raised with regards to the validity of my results. To consider these it is important to briefly examine the kinds of validity I can, and cannot claim for my research. In raising the issue of validity in this way, I encounter a potential problem with regards to the usefulness and appropriateness of this concept itself. Notions relating to the validity (and reliability) of a set of results derive from an 'objective' quantitative approach (Agar, 1986). Essentially, the validity of a set of results in a quantitative context is generally taken to mean the extent to which an interpretation or measurement accurately represents an object or phenomenon (Silverman, 1993). There are a variety of techniques and methods through which validity in this sense can be assured (e.g. replication). However, such techniques all assume a 'realist' position that characterises the social world as inherently measurable. From a discursive analytic, and thus constructionist, orientation, the notion of examining a 'real' social world is problematic. Attempting to assure the validity of claims relating to such an examination is thus disavowed. Yet, while validity in this 'received' sense (Agar, 1986) may be rejected as inappropriate when undertaking discursive or many other forms of qualitative analysis, it is important to maintain a degree of rigour in the analytic claims that are made (Potter, 1995). The 'validity', in this sense, of the analytic observations and claims that are made are an important consideration when undertaking an examination of discursive practices.

There are a number of ways in which the validity of a particular discursive analysis may be assured. One of the most central of these is the grounding of analytic claims in the actions and concerns of the participants (Potter, 1997). By demonstrating the ways in which interpretative conclusions are reached by making reference to the text itself is an important means of assuring observations are based upon a rigorous examination of what is actually said (Coyle, 1995). One way of achieving this is reproduce a full transcript of the talk that constitutes the focus of analysis: as I have done. The analyst is thus able to demonstrate the basis of his/her observations while at the same time enabling the reader to check that these are justified in relation to the discourse itself.

It is, of course, quite plausible that two different analysts will interpret a piece of talk and the actions performed within it in completely different ways. Although each of these analyses 'may be fully grounded in what is said by respondents, the interpretative dimension of discourse work makes every observation that is made contestable. To ensure that analysts produce rigorous and robust work, it is essential that analytic claims are coherent and make scholarly sense (Silverman, 1983). One way of establishing such coherence is to relate to other discursive, or relevant, studies as a means of building upon the insights offered by earlier work (Potter, 1995). The consensus developed over a number of research projects may be used to establish the coherence, and validity, of particular observations.

In relation to food, the notion of coherence is problematic. As it stands there is no existing literature that takes as its focus the kinds reasoning procedures that may be culturally available to men with regards to food. However, many of the fact-construction techniques that may be observed in men's talk do mesh with discursive studies. Consequently, to ensure the validity of my observations, I have made brief reference to other studies on, for example the use of lists and contrasts. (e.g. Smith, 1978)

As one of the measures commonly employed (i.e. coherence) to assure the validity of analysis of reasoning procedures cannot be employed in relation to this project, my role as scholar takes on increased significance. There is no relevant or comparable discursive research within which to mesh my observations. In order to develop my observations in a scholarly and rigorous manner, I have attempted to demonstrate how the analytic claims I make link to relevant 'social knowledges' (Billig, 1988): social knowledges that are resonated in many academics and lay texts. In undertaking this process, I am relying upon the reader to evaluate (Potter, 1996) my claims and the links that I make on the basis of their own understanding of the issues at hand. In this respect, it is the coherence of my observations with regards to the understanding of 'social knowledges' shared by the reader that enable the rigour of my claims to be evaluated. Assuring the rigour of my claims in this way is important, but this process should be taken to imply that my analysis can ever be considered as anything more than a construction. As a construction my 'reading' cannot be privileged over any other (although, as I have argued, there is here a role for scholarship and rigour in assuring the reasonableness of the claims that are made). Highlighting my own role in constructing this account enables me stress that the analysis I have produced is not a scientific explication of an objective and measurable reality, but instead a specific 'reading' of men's talk about food.

Becoming aware of my relativised position enables me to reflect critically and ask questions as to why I am interpreting particular statements or terms in a specific way. It also allows me to consider what alternative interpretations may be available and ask if these versions may be plausible constructions, even although they may be unfamiliar or seemingly problematic to me. The notion of familiarity is an important feature of any reflexive activity such as this. There are many specific constructions of the world that may have become so familiar that they seem unproblematic and real to me as a white, twenty seven year old male living in Scotland. However, to a reader interrogating the text

from a different standpoint, my analysis may appear neglectful or even inaccurate and an alternative reading proposed.

There is no way of ascertaining which of these readings is 'valid' in an objective, realist sense. Both are discursive constructions and as such can thus be analysed for the linguistic strategies and culturally available reasoning procedures they employ. One way forward in this respect may be for me to locate the reading I have produced within my own personal narrative. In doing so it may be possible to identify some of the ways in which the discursive practices within which I am enmeshed may be imparted upon the analysis I have produced (Ashmore, 1989). Such reflexivity would also embed the analysis I have produced within a firmly constructionist rhetoric that works to undermine any realist notions that may arise from the social-scientific paradigm within which it is presented. However, a reflexive analysis of this nature is outwith the scope of this particular thesis. It is important, though, to recognise the role of analytic reflexivity in accentuating the constructed and positioned nature of any piece of discursive analysis such as this.

## 7.8 Developing the research

I have so far in this chapter considered some of the main themes emerging from this study in addition to reflecting specifically upon the methodological stance I have adopted. To round off some of these issues and provide a firm conclusion to my work it is important that I explore briefly how this research may be developed or extended.

The breadth of food as a topic of study makes identifying further areas for examination a straightforward venture. For example, it would seem relevant to extend discursive examination of the kind undertaken in this study to the talk of women or other cohorts of the population such as children and the elderly. As I described in the introduction, each of these categories has been characterised by academic and everyday knowledge, as occupying a specific relationship to food. By undertaking a discursive examination of talk, the kinds of cultural resources employed by members of these specific categories themselves may be considered and a broader 'map' (Wetherell and Potter, 1992) of culturally available linguistic resources developed. Additionally, there are a number of substantive issues outwith the scope of this particular study that are important and thus merit academic attention. Eating out in various restaurants (other than fast food), for example, is an issue that could not be considered in this thesis but that is being characterised as of increasing significance (Wood, 1996). Alternatively, there are also issues regarding the genetic modification of foods and the relationships between food and disease that are increasingly stressed within popular media forms. Analysis to consider some of the ways in which these issues are becoming incorporated into common sense linguistic resources would be valuable.

Rather than pursue these ideas in any more depth, a task more central to this chapter is the consideration of the specific ways in which this particular study could itself be extended and developed. One specific aspect that it is important to consider relates to the kinds of data that I have gained employing an interview approach. Using interviews to elicit talk has a number of advantages. They are a practical medium that enable analysts to elicit accounts on relevant topics (Potter, 1997). Indeed, as I discussed in chapter two, interviews may not necessarily be considered in terms of objective researchers eliciting responses from subjects treated unproblematically as 'vessels of answers' (Holstein and Gubrium, 1997) but as a form of social interaction in their own right. In adopting an 'active' stance whereby responses to questions are considered in a more critical way and

perhaps questioned explicitly within the interaction (e.g. Wetherell and Potter, 1992), researchers are able to gain access to a wide range of 'practical ideologies' (Billig *et al.*, 1988) that may be employed in forms of social argumentation outwith the context of an interview.

While interviews may be considered an acceptable means for the generation of accounts from a discourse analytic perspective, it is important to recognise their limitations. Interview talk is inevitably constrained by a number of powerful expectations regarding scientific investigation on behalf of respondents. Furthermore, the interview is a contrived context in which a researcher's formulations and interests are paramount: expressed, as they are in the interview schedule and the very conduct of the interview itself. One way of developing this research, based as it is upon the results of interviews, may therefore be to collect *naturally occurring* talk about food by men. This data would allow the constraints of the interview context to be overcome and those cultural resources employed in a natural interactional context examined. However, there are a number of practical and ethical issues relating to the acquisition of naturally occurring men's talk about food. Practically, getting access to such talk is obviously problematic for men may simply not talk about food in many contexts where tape recording conversation is theoretically possible (e.g. pubs). While it may be possible to tape record interactions taking place in circumstances where it is more likely food issues may be discussed (e.g. supermarkets, round the dinner table), there are ethical problems of gaining access to such data without formulating an interview scenario.

While it would be valuable to focus upon naturally occurring talk it is important not to overplay the notion of 'naturalness' in this respect. As Potter (1997) has argued, talk produced within an interview can be regarded in itself as natural in the sense that it is natural interaction-in-interview. One way in which the practical demands of eliciting men's accounts of food may be balanced with the problems arising from a contrived



interview context may therefore be to adjust the ways in which interview interactions are carried out. In this research, the interviews were generally undertaken in the respondents' home or workplace. They were formulated as interviews and carried out on the basis of a set of written topics and questions. It may be possible, instead, to work with the everyday practices and activities of respondents more closely and thus downplay the contrived, social scientific nature of the interaction. For instance, it may be possible to accompany men while they undertake shopping. In doing so the analyst will be able to engage with the respondent regarding the kinds of food purchased and issues relating to such decisions in a more natural, everyday context (i.e. a supermarket). It would thus be the activities and descriptions of the respondent that form the focus of the interaction, rather than the pre-conceived interview topics decided upon by the interviewer. Similarly, it may also be possible for a researcher to take part in family eating routines and engage interactionally over the course of these with members of the household collectively regarding the male's approach to food. This would allow the existing family dynamics to stimulate an interaction with which both the male and researcher actively engage.

In addition to developing this research by collecting data in different ways, there are also a number of strands that have emerged from the analysis that may constitute interesting topics for further work. In relation to domestic tasks such as cooking and shopping a number of respondents produced accounts designed to stress that they are not responsible for the household environment. Some specific justifications for this state of affairs were produced. As men's lack of responsibility for the household context has been formulated by many analysts (e.g. Charles and Kerr, 1988) as a feature of the continued subordination of women, a deeper understanding of the kinds of cultural resources employed by men (and indeed women) in describing and justifying this state of affairs are of interest. Additional work could focus more specifically upon a broader range of justifications that may be employed when talking about food in the domestic context.

Alternatively, a general theme emerging from the analysis, such as the downplaying of responsibility for the household, could be identified as a topic for further research, and the descriptive and rhetorical means through which this action may be accomplished further considered.

Another means of progressing this research would be to focus more specifically upon the content of the cultural resources that may be employed – in relation to different analytic concerns - in the form of an examination of the kinds of ‘interpretative repertoires’ (Potter and Wetherell, 1987) that are of relevance. In relation to the household, for example, such an examination could take the form of other studies focusing upon the justification of injustice (e.g. Gill, 1993) or discrimination (e.g. Wetherell and Potter, 1992) whereby the limited number of repertoires primarily drawn upon in accounts are examined and the context of their use identified. As I discussed in chapter 2, the notion of context is of importance for any analysis of interpretative repertoires as it, in contrast to post-structuralist discourse analysis, maintains reference to the actions being performed in talk and thus stresses the flexible, practical nature of the cultural resources available. However, this approach is significantly different to the one I have taken in this research for the focus is not primarily upon discursive action, but the kinds of social knowledge that are employed. To extend this focus, it would be possible to examine materials other than accounts, such as newspapers and magazines, for the kinds of constructions that permeate common-sensical knowledge regarding food in the household context.

While undertaking an examination of interpretative repertoires regarding responsibility within the household, there are many other issues emerging from this research that could provide the basis for further work in a similar vein. For example, the kinds of interpretative repertoires employed by men when talking about weight and slimming may be examined and related to the discursive construction of the body. This examination

could go on to consider the ways in which notions of the body being controlled through food are embedded within western constructions of the self as intra-active (Ogden, 1996). Again, the focus here is less upon the discursive actions performed by respondents in talk and more upon the nature and of the culturally available interpretative repertoires that are employed.

Rather than focusing upon broad areas such as interpretative repertoires relevant to weight and slimming, it is equally possible to progress this research by focusing upon specific constructions observed within the accounts. One respondent, for instance, employed the notion of bodily need, as a means of justifying the consumption of sweets. This construction is interesting as, it formulates the body as self-regulating - a construction that implicitly detaches the material and psychic realms. It would be possible to examine this construction in greater depth by analysing its socio-historical production, and its relationship to other relevant constructions of the body, and indeed selfhood. Such an examination, of the kind undertaken on Anorexia Nervosa by Hepworth and Griffin (1990) would take the notion of the self-regulating body as a starting point, with little further regard as to how it may be employed contextually within interactions. Consequently, this kind of analysis is moving further toward a post-structuralist analysis of discourse that takes as its primary object of study a particular construction of the world. As such, if my research were progressed in this way it would be the political concerns of the analysts that formulate the kinds of analysis produced.

In contrast to a far greater focus on the *content* on the cultural resources that may be drawn upon in talk, there is another way in which this research could be developed. While the nature of the research questions I have been considering made the use of pre-formulated analytic categories inevitable, it would be possible to undertake research on food whereby the formulations and assumptions of the analysts are not manifest in the design of the study. In other words, it would be possible to simply analyse participants

talk without making prior reference to the ethnographic status and particulars of respondents, and indeed the constructions of 'food' that may be relevant. Such an approach would enable the analyst to consider in more depth the kinds of categories employed by participants and the ways in which these are worked up and made relevant (Potter, 1997). In this sense, gender or food categories would become relevant to the analysis only when participants make them relevant.

One way of conducting such an examination would be to re-examine the data collected for this research without reference to any prior categories or formulations. For instance, the kinds of justifications employed by participants in relation to a lack of involvement in the domestic arena may be analysed specifically in terms of the linguistic devices employed to work up, warrant and manufacture these claims. Particular attention may be paid to the fact construction devices employed (Edwards and Potter, 1992) or the ways in which particular identities are claimed both by the interviewer and by the participants themselves.

## 7.9 A significant contribution to knowledge

In this chapter I have concluded my research by firstly outlining some of the main themes to emerge from the analysis, secondly by reflecting upon the theoretical and methodological stance I have adopted and finally by considering briefly some possible ways in which the research could be extended and developed. As a conclusion it seems appropriate to re-iterate the significant contribution to knowledge that this research offers. I have examined the kinds of discursive actions that are employed by men when talking about food. I have considered the tacit reasoning procedures pertaining to food that may be culturally available linguistic resources in addition to the ways in which accounts of food are constructed. The observations that have been made offer a number of critical and innovative insights of relevance of academic, professional and lay

communities. As such they constitute a contribution to knowledge that may be characterised as significant.

# APPENDICES EXCLUDED DUE TO COPYRIGHT REASONS

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